

# TEEVADHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

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## GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR

JESUS' GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR

*George Mangatt*

POVERTY IN THE CHURCH

*George Puthumana*

SHOULD THE CHURCH BE POOR?

*J. C. Manalel*

RELIGIOUS WITNESS TO POVERTY

*F. B. Connolly*

WEALTH AND POWER AND THE CATHOLIC  
CHURCH IN INDIA

*Samuel Rayan*

THE IDEAL OF POVERTY IN THE RELIGIOUS  
TRADITIONS OF INDIA

*K. Luke*

BULLETIN: THE CHURCH AND GARIBI HATAO

*Alfred de Souza*

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# JEEVADHARA

— A Journal of Christian Interpretation —

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# The People of God

**GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR**

Editor :

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# Editorial

The present issue of *Jeevadhara* centres on the theme of "good news to the poor" and examines it from a variety of angles. Since Vatican II the Church has been returning to the sources and thus to the original spirit of Christianity, namely, the sense of communion of the people of God. The early Church deemed no sacrifice too great for fostering this spirit. It had been said that her unconcern about worldly goods was the outcome of looking forward to the immediate accomplishment of the kingdom of God in its consummation. But then it is not substantially different from our own idea of a pilgrim Church, eschatologically oriented, where each of us has a part to play in the fulfilment of God's purpose.

There was a time when the Church through the acquisition of material wealth and power seems to have mistaken her mission to the poor as an attitude of almsgiving and temporary relief. Since Vatican II it has become clear that ours is the Church of the poor not in the sense that she promotes material poverty, but that she frees herself of the trammels of the world, and works for the liberation of the poor through a change of structures of oppression. The poor should be helped to develop themselves to the fulness of their dignity as God's children.

It is in relation to the poor of the world that the Church appears most to have lost the credibility of her witness. The Gospel ideal and the Church's practice with regard to riches and power seem to diverge. As somebody has well said, the Church holds up the poor and bleeding Christ in silk-gloved hands. Some of those who are considered spokesmen of the Church are still tenacious of the power that 'lords it over' others and maintains the order of precedence. The question 'Who is to be accounted the greatest?' continues to be discussed behind closed doors. The outward appearance of the 'official' Church, though

the term is to be deprecated, is often, at least in this part of the country, one of pomp and display in apparel, carriage, furnishings, celebrations and receptions. Her link with the rich and the powerful is closer than with the poor. The rich in the Church do not show any special interest in their poor brethren. The religious who vow to be poor for the sake of the kingdom of God do not at all appear so. Hence the relevance of the topic under discussion.

In *Jesus' Good News to the Poor* George Mangatt explains the meaning and application of the 'poor' in the background of the Old Testament and shows that Jesus conceived his mission as God's great intervention in favour of them. Jesus' good news of the Kingdom to the poor has lost none of its actuality for the human race today. *Poverty in the Church* by George Puthumana explores the intrinsic significance of poverty not only as an attack against social inequalities but as an inevitable choice between total commitment to God and attachment to the world. He also touches on the spiritual implications of the struggle against material poverty. Whereas he is concerned with the inner meaning of poverty and the personal witness it involves, the editor's article *Should the Church be Poor?* dwells on the corporate witness of the Church to her dedication to this Christian ideal. Without such a witness the Church cannot make an impact in her work of evangelization, nor can she win credibility in her services to the poor. What is the *Religious Witness to Poverty?* This question is examined by F. B. Connolly who maintains that what the religious in all sincerity call 'poverty' is far from poverty in the eyes of millions of their countrymen. As a sign of the Kingdom it has lost its value as witness. He recounts Pope Paul's contributions to the revival of this witness by practical directives.

Samuel Rayan in his article *Wealth and Power and the Catholic Church in India* speaks of the Church's image of affluence created by multifold institutions and style of life. As this image does not seem to agree with the poverty and powerlessness which characterized Jesus' own witness, he makes critical reflections on the nature of the Church's mission today. K. Luke, in a philological and historical enquiry into *The Ideal of Poverty in the Religious Traditions of India* does not attempt a detailed



comparison with the Christian view but tries, in the limited scope of an article, to expound the philosophies and practices of Hindus, Buddhists and Jains in regard to this side of religious life. In *The Church and Garibi Hatao* Alfred de Souza shows how the Church has successfully and creditably met emergencies in the country by mobilizing her personnel and technical skills, and how she is moving today from relief to liberation and development. He then draws an appalling picture of poverty and its consequent evils in India and delineates the new tasks that deserve the attention of the Church today

The editor regrets that issues of *Jeevadhara* are sometimes published behind time. This is due to the fact that the section editors are scattered all over the country and are busy with other important occupations as well, and that they cannot get easy and quick access to the articles for publication. It is also due to printing of editions done in two Presses in two different districts. Everything possible is being done to minimize delays. In the meantime we request our readers to bear with us and we hope we do not inconvenience them by our difficulties.

Theology Centre  
Alleppey

J. C. Manalel

# Jesus' Good News to the Poor

The theme of the "good news to the poor" is central to the proclamation of Jesus. The first three Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount enunciate this good news with particular emphasis and clarity:<sup>1</sup>

Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of God.  
Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.  
Blessed are those who hunger, for they shall be satisfied.

These Beatitudes are a pointed formulation of the general proclamation of the kingdom of God with which Jesus inaugurates his public life: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel." (Mk 1: 15; Mt 4: 17)

In his inaugural sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth Jesus reveals the program of his ministry, quoting the prophecy of Isaiah.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk 4: 18-19).

Jesus' mission concerns the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed. He announces the end of their sufferings. Inspired by his divine mission he declares: "Today this scripture has

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1. Mt 5:3,4,6, - Lk 6:20,21. The original form of these Beatitudes, their order, their redaction by the evangelists, etc. are discussed. See J' Dupont, *Les Béatitudes* I, J. Gabalda, Paris, 1969, pp. 209-223, 265-298. I give the probably original form of the Beatitudes as reconstructed by J. Dupont, p. 343.

been fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21). Now, while you are listening to my words, this mission is inaugurated; the good news is being proclaimed to the poor...

The answer of Jesus to the disciples of John the Baptist (Mt 11: 4 - 6 = Lk 7: 22 - 23) claims that his ministry (cf. Mt 11: 2: "the deeds of the Christ"), to which the hearers are witnesses, is the fulfilment of the promises of God about the messianic era in which

the blind receive their sight  
the lame walk  
lepers are cleansed  
the deaf hear  
the dead are raised up  
and the poor have the good news preached to them.

Contrary to the expectation of John the Baptist Jesus' mission is not to judge (cf. Mt 3: 7 - 12; Lk 3: 7 - 9, 15 - 17) but to show mercy and to save the miserable and the unfortunate. How far the fulfilment surpasses the promise is indicated by the mention of the cleansing of the lepers and the raising of the dead, which is not found in the prophetic texts alluded to (Is 29: 18 - 19; 35: 5 - 7; 49: 9 - 10, 13; 61: 1 - 3), but clearly refers to "the deeds of the Christ" (cf. Mt 8: 2 - 4; 9: 18 - 26). But the climax and summary of Jesus' messianic mission is announcing the good news to the poor. It reveals him as the anointed of God, the messenger of God's good news.

There are other sayings of Jesus which bring out the privilege of the poor and the unfortunate in the Kingdom of God proclaimed by him. In the parable of the Great Banquet (Lk 14: 15 - 24 = Mt 22: 2 - 14) the beneficiaries of the eschatological banquet are not the respectable people who were invited, but the uninvited, "the poor and maimed and blind and lame" (Lk 14: 21). In Mt 11: 28, with infinite tenderness Jesus invites those who labour and are burdened to whom he promises rest in his presence. If we turn this invitation into a Beatitude it will sound like the Beatitude of the poor and the afflicted. The rest Jesus promises is the eschatological rest of the Kingdom of God. The same fundamental thought is revealed in Jesus' saying that the kingdom of God belongs only to children (Mk 10: 14 - 15;

Mt 18:3), and that God hides his mysteries from the wise and the understanding and reveals them to babes (Mt 11:25-26 = Lk 10:21), and that Jesus came not to call the righteous but sinners (Mk 2:17).

It is clear that Jesus conceived his mission as God's great intervention in favour of the poor and the miserable. God shows His mercy to all unhappy people by giving them salvation in His eschatological reign inaugurated by Jesus' ministry.

### The Old Testament background

In proclaiming the poor blessed, Jesus is only continuing and fulfilling an important theme in O. T. prophecy.<sup>2</sup> Jesus' announcement that only the poor inherit the Kingdom of God and that the afflicted will be consoled refers evidently to the prophecy of Is. 61:1-3, which foretells precisely the announcement of the good news of salvation to the poor and the afflicted, together with all sorts of unfortunate people: the broken-hearted, captives, prisoners, those who mourn and are faint in spirit. In the inaugural sermon at Nazareth Is. 61:1-2 is quoted, with the addition "to set at liberty those who are oppressed", taken from Is. 58:6. The answer of Jesus to the disciples of John the Baptist also has the theme of the salvation of the unfortunate as in Is. 61:1-3, and the statement "the good news is preached to the poor" is quoted from Is. 61:1. The statement that "the blind receive their sight" may be dependent on the LXX version of Is. 61:1-3, which substitutes "the blind" for "the prisoners." Other elements in Jesus' answer could be derived from various texts of Isaiah. Is. 29:18-19 speaks of the deaf and the blind, the meek and the poor:

In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book  
and out of their gloom and darkness the  
eyes of the blind shall see.

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2. Cf. J. Dupont, *Béatitudes* II, Paris, 1969, pp. 39-44, 92-99; A. Gelin, *The Poor of Yahweh*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1964, pp. 27-42; J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, Scribners, New York, 1971, pp. 103-108.



The meek (Hebrew: *'anawim*) shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord

and the poor (Heb: *'ebyonim*) among men shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.

Is. 35:3-6 gives a long list of the unhappy people who will enjoy God's salvation:

Strengthen the weak hands,  
and make firm the feeble knees,  
Say to those who are of a fearful heart,  
"Be strong, fear not!"  
Behold your God... will come and save you."  
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
then shall the lame man leap like a hart,  
and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy

Is. 49:7-13 speaks of God's compassion for the afflicted, which comforts His people by liberating the captives and freeing those who are on the way home from hunger and thirst and heat.

We find similar texts also in other prophets. Jer. 31:8-9 speaks of the consolation of the return from the affliction of the exile, which will not be denied even to the blind and the lame and the women with child, whose difficult condition would seem to be a hindrance to their return journey. The moving prophecy of Ez 34 announces that the Lord himself will shepherd his flock, taking particular care of his sheep which have been scattered and lost and injured and are ill and weak, delivering them from the bad shepherds and the fat sheep who were oppressing them. This prophecy draws a most beautiful picture of God's solicitude for the lost and the oppressed.

The blessing of the hungry (Lk 6:21 = Mt 5:6) evokes a theme in O. T. prophecy that those whom Jahweh saves will not suffer hunger and thirst. The prophecy of Is 49: 7-13 contains the promise that the liberated exiles will not suffer hunger and thirst (v. 10) on their way through the desert back to Jerusalem, for their compassionate God has decided to liberate and comfort them. Is 55: 1-5 invites all those who are hungry and thirsty to eat a rich meal of bread and water and wine and milk and be satisfied, because God establishes a new covenant

with them. Similar promises are repeated in Is 65:13; 66:10. In these prophecies the poor who cannot procure the food necessary to satisfy their hunger are told that God is moved to pity at their unhappiness and will provide it for them.

The three Beatitudes of the Gospels we have referred to (of the poor, of the afflicted and of the hungry) alluding to O. T. prophecies announce that God's eschatological intervention will benefit all those who suffer. Jesus' inaugural address at Nazareth and his answer to the disciples of John the Baptist unmistakably mean that this great intervention of God in favour of the unfortunate takes place in Jesus, who proclaims the good news of the kingdom of God and makes it effective by his deeds.

### Who are the poor?

The word "poor" (Greek: *ptochos*) used in the Gospels means, in classical Greek usage, a beggar who, incapable of procuring the means of subsistence, must obtain them from others by begging.<sup>3</sup> Another Greek word for poor is *penēs* which means a labourer who must work hard to earn a living and cannot afford luxuries, in contrast to a rich man who can live well without working. In the Septuagint the same Hebrew word is translated indiscriminately by *penēs* or *ptōchos*, without a special nuance, as though both terms are equivalent. In the Gospels the usual term for 'poor' is *ptōchos* (*penēs* occurs in the N. T. only in 2 Cor. 9:9) and generally means, as in classical Greek, the needy who must be helped with alms (cf. Mk 10:21 par; 14:5. 7 par; Lk 19:9 etc.)<sup>4</sup>

However, in interpreting the texts which concern us (Beatitudes of the poor, good news to the poor) we cannot simply assume the meaning of classical Greek but must take into

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3. Cf. J. Dupont, *Béatitudes* II pp. 20-24; H. Kahlefeld *Der Juenger*, Knecht, Frankfurt, 1962, pp. 25-27; A. George, art: Pauvre, in *DBS* VII, cc. 395-396;
  4. Cf. A. George, in *DBS* VIII, c. 398; J. Dupont, in: A. George et al., *La Pauvreté évangélique*, Cerf, Paris, 1971, pp. 38-40.

account the original Hebrew meaning<sup>5</sup>, since these texts clearly allude to the O. T. prophecies of consolation. The most important Hebrew word for the poor is 'ani, plural, 'aniyyim (verbal adjective passive of the root 'anah = to stoop, to be bent, to submit) used 73 times in the Hebrew Bible. It means one who is bent, lowly, oppressed, without rights, defenceless, who must yield and submit himself. Poor and defenceless, he is at the mercy of his oppressors, a victim of exploitation. The accent is less on economic distress than on the oppression, humiliation and exploitation which he suffers. In some contexts it receives a religious colouring: the oppressors are considered to be proud and unjust, and in contrast the 'aniyyim are the humble people who confide in God. A later parallel form influenced by Aramaic, is 'anaw, plural, 'anawim, which gradually came to take on a moral and religious connotation and which means not only people who are oppressed and defenceless, but who are peaceful, gentle, humble and submissive, especially to God.

Another important term used 61 times in the Hebrew Bible, 'ebyon, plural, 'ebyonim (from the root, 'abah = to wish, to desire) means one who needs and implores help, to satisfy his elementary material needs (= poor) or to obtain justice against powerful oppressors (= defenceless person). In his need he turns to God and reveals his misery.

Thus "the poor" in the Bible is less an economic term as it is in modern languages than a sociological one, often with a religious overtone: the poor occupy an inferior place in society on account of which they are defenceless and at the mercy of oppressors and exploiters. The idea that they are the just and the pious who turn to God for help is often found.

The terms "the poor" of the first Beatitude, "the afflicted" of the second Beatitude (*pentountes*, from the Greek verb

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5. Cf. J. Dupont, *Beatitudes* II, pp. 24-34; A. Gelin, *Poor*, pp. 15-26; A. George, *DBS* VII, c.c. 387-390; A. George et al., *Pauvreté*, pp. 14-17; E. Neuhaeusler, *Anspruch und Antwort Gottes*, Patmos, Duesseldorf, 1962, pp. 141-169; J. A. Phillips, *The Sermon on the Mount*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1965, pp. 3-8.

*penteomai*; or 'abelim, from the Hebrew verb 'abal'), and "the hungry" of the third Beatitude (*peinōntes*, from the Greek verb *peinaō*, which in LXX translates the Hebrew verb *ra'eb*) do not refer really to different classes of people. The poor are also the afflicted who express their suffering by exterior signs like weeping, and lamentation. Luke has concretized the term by speaking of "those who weep" (6:21). The hungry in the biblical sense are not those who are in the best disposition for a good meal, but those who have nothing to eat, those who are starving. To be hungry is the normal lot of the poor and the beggars (Job 24:4; 10, Ps 34:11).

The beneficiaries of the three Beatitudes really form a single group of the poor, hungry and mourning, considered under different aspects.<sup>6</sup> Similarly there is close relation between the second parts of these Beatitudes, each emphasizing a particular aspect of God's intervention in favour of these unhappy people: the Kingdom of God means concretely consolation and satisfaction of hunger. We may then speak of a single Beatitude in three forms, each with a particular nuance. This is suggested by the prophetic texts referred to above in which these groups of people are found closely associated in one and the same text.

A closer look at the Gospels shows us that the meaning of the term "poor" extends into a wider sphere. As explained above, Jesus' inaugural sermon at Nazareth and his answer to the disciples of John the Baptist recall the prophecies of the Old Testament, which are fulfilled in Jesus' messianic activity. In the prophecy "the poor" is associated with and explained by parallel expressions "the broken-hearted" "captives", "the oppressed", "those who are bound" "those who mourn" "the blind", "the lame" etc. — that is, people who are in any way suffering or oppressed and cannot help themselves. In Mt 11:4-6 and Lk 7:22-23 Jesus himself associates the poor with the blind, the lame, lepers, the deaf and the dead. The preaching of the good news to the poor comes at the end of the sentence as its climax and summary, suggesting that Jesus' good news is announced to all who are in misery and it means the end of their distress.

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Cf. J. Dupont, *Béatitudes* II, pp. 39-49.



Jesus, therefore, used the term "poor" in a comprehensive sense, continuing the prophetic tradition. In the parable of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-41) all sorts of needy people are called the brethren of the eschatological judge: the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, foreigners, the sick, captives. Other characterizations of the poor which we have in the words of Jesus are "the little ones" (Mk 9: 42; Mt 10:42; 18:10, 14), "the simple ones" contrasted with the wise and understanding, and so, the uneducated, the immature, the country folk (Mt 11:25), "those who labour and are heavy laden" (Mt 11:28), "the publicans and sinners" (Mk 2:17 par; Mt 11:19 par; Lk 15:1). In short, in Jesus' language "the poor" means all unfortunate people who suffer any sort of affliction, economic, physical, social or spiritual.<sup>7</sup>

There is a significant difference between Matthew and Luke in the understanding of the term "the poor" in the first Beatitude.<sup>8</sup> While Luke has the shorter form "Blessed are you poor" without qualification, Matthew writes "Blessed are the poor in spirit." "In spirit" seems to be Matthew's addition, first because Luke would not have omitted it if it was traditional, and secondly because Mt 11: 5; Lk 7:22 and Lk 4:18 have "the poor" without qualification. Besides, it is only Matthew who adds in the Beatitudes of those who hunger and thirst and of those who are persecuted the specification "for righteousness" (5:6, 10). Matthew seems to be thinking of spiritual dispositions, continuing the prophetic tradition in which *'anawim* has a religious meaning. For Matthew "the poor" are people who are poor before God, who stand before God in humility, conscious of their spiritual poverty and beg salvation from him. This radical interiorization of the concept of poverty in Matthew is understandable because the tradition of Matthew was opposed to the danger of pharisaic self-righteousness in the Jewish Christian communities.

7. J. Jeremias, *N. T. Theology*, pp. 109-112.

8. Cf. J. Jeremias, *N. T. Theology*, pp. 112-113, J. Dupont, *Béatitudes* II, pp. 209-217, and in: *Pauvreté*, pp. 48-49; A. Gelin, *Poor*, p. 108; R. E. Brown, *New Testament Essays*, Bruce, Milwaukee, 1965, pp. 265-271. G. Strecker, *Les Macarismes*, in: M. Didier, *L'Évangile Selon Matthieu*, Duculot, Gembloux, 1972, pp. 185-208 (193-195).

But Luke's simpler form, as indicated above, is more original. It means those who are really poor, even as the following verses mean those who are really weeping and hungry and persecuted (Lk 6: 21-22; cf. also vv. 24-26: Woe to the rich etc.). We must also remember that Lk 4: 18-19; and 7: 22 = Mt 11: 4-5 parallel the poor with other classes of unfortunate people: captives, the oppressed, the blind, the deaf, lepers etc. It is not possible to understand these terms in a spiritual sense. So we have to understand "the poor" also in a similar sense. We can imagine what a message of consolation this proclamation of Jesus meant for the lowly and oppressed churches Luke was addressing.

These considerations lead us to the problem why Jesus proclaimed the poor blessed and heirs of the kingdom of God.

### **Why are the poor blessed**

Why does Jesus declare the kingdom of God the exclusive heritage of the poor? Does Jesus canonize a sociological state and social class by placing it in exclusive relation to the Kingdom of God? Some think that since spiritual gift of the Kingdom of God can be received only in a spiritual situation, the poverty of the Gospel should be understood as a spiritual disposition, as it seems to be by Matthew to which real poverty would be a privileged path. What is meant by poverty would be the spiritual disposition of humility, submission to God, expectation of salvation from God. This is what would make the poor worthy of the kingdom of God.<sup>9</sup>

But this is thinking in our modern categories. To discover the real meaning of Jesus' proclamation we have to see it in its original background. What Jesus really expresses is God's loving solicitude for the poor and the oppressed and His reign in favour of the poor.

The background of this way of thinking is the royal ideology of the ancient Near East and especially of Israel.<sup>10</sup> In

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9. Cf. the opinions of A. Gelin, T. W. Manson, R. Bultmann, L. Goppelt, quoted by J. Dupont, *Béatitudes* II. pp. 13-15.
  10. Cf. *op. cit.*, pp. 54-90.

Mesopotamia, Ugarit and Egypt the ideal king exercises his perfect rule by assuring justice to all, by defending the defenceless and protecting the poor, the widow, the orphan, the oppressed and the disinherited, who are at the mercy of the powerful and the rich. The idea was easily transposed to the gods: lords of human destiny, they manifest their power by helping the poor and suffering man in his distress. The poor can claim and implore from the gods the protection that is denied to them by men.

In Israel Jahweh was acknowledged as the king of the people and the defender and protector of the poor and the oppressed, who had a claim on His mercy and solicitude. The care of the poor is first of all God's royal prerogative; it becomes the duty of the human king only by way of consequence.

Many texts speak of this constant care of God for the poor which He manifests by executing "justice" (*mishpat*) on behalf of the poor. The oppressed person is "just", that is, justice is on his side, in opposition to the oppressor who is unjust and impious. Jahweh intervenes and exercises His royal prerogatives by putting down the oppressor and restoring the rights of the oppressed. Jahweh's justice is really His compassionate solicitude for the weak and the poor. This is beautifully expressed by Dt 10: 17-18:

For the Lord your God is God of gods  
and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty,  
and the terrible God, who is not partial  
and takes no bribe. He executes justice  
for the fatherless and the widow, and  
loves the sojourner,  
giving him food and clothing.

We find the same conception in many Psalms. Jahweh's protection of the oppressed and His loving solicitude for the poor are movingly portrayed in Ps 9: 10; 68: 6-7; 8-10; 146: 7-10 etc.

Jahweh not only executes justice in defence of the poor; He also demands that justice be done to the poor. The Israelites must care for the fatherless, the widow, the poor and the foreigner

not only by not afflicting them but by providing for them (Ex 22:20-26; Dt 15:7-18; 24: 14-15, 19-22). The foundation for this obligation is religious: Jahweh is their protector. This duty is particularly laid on kings and rulers (Ps 82: 1-2; Jer 21:12; 22: 2-5). Those who fail to do it are severely condemned (Jer 22: 13-17; Amos 3: 14-15; 101-2).

Some texts, prophetic ones, announce that the great eschatological intervention of God will be for the benefit of the poor and the unfortunate and will reveal His royal solicitude for them in all splendour. The Book of Consolation of Isaiah to which Jesus' words refer expresses this thought with particular force (cf. above). In Ez 34 God's royal activity is compared to the action of a shepherd caring for his illtreated and suffering sheep. The eschatological coming of Jahweh will be a manifestation of His compassionate tenderness for the weak and the oppressed and of His victory over their enemies (cf. Mi 4: 6-7; Is 25: 4-5; 29: 19-21; 35: 2-10; 40: 9-11). We shall only mention here the closely related theme of the expectation of an ideal eschatological king, the Messiah, who will realize concretely God's merciful plans (cf. Is 8: 23-9: 3; 11: 2-3; Ps 72).

It is to these prophecies that Jesus refers when he speaks of the privilege of the poor and the suffering in the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God thus means God's exercise of His royal authority, with which He will execute justice and give happiness to the poor and the afflicted. Therefore it is not so much a question of the spiritual dispositions of these people as of the very nature of the sovereign rule of God, the Protector of the poor. It is their humiliated, afflicted and defenceless situation which moves God to compassion and to action in their favour.

The poverty of the Beatitudes is not, therefore, an ideal proposed to Jesus' disciples; it is a tragic human situation which cries out for God's justice and mercy. He will act in favour of those who are in it.

### **The good news of God's kingdom**

The content of the good news proclaimed to the poor is: "Yours is the Kingdom of God" (Mt 5: 3; Lk 6: 20). This promise

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11. Cf. J. Dupont, in: A. George et al., *Pauvreté*, p. 52.



also is inspired by Isaiah's Prophecy of Consolation<sup>12</sup>, especially the beautiful words of Is 52: 7-12.

V. 7 is particularly significant, since it links the theme of the good news with that of the kingdom of God:

How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of him who brings  
good tidings of *good*,  
who publishes salvation,  
who says to Zion:  
"Your God reigns."

The messenger brings to the people of Jerusalem the good news of the victory of Jahweh over the Babylonian oppressors and the establishment of Jahweh's reign over Zion. V. 8f. announces the joyous news of the arrival of Jahweh who redeems and comforts his people in a way more glorious than in Exodus (vv. 11-12).

The Targum (Aramaic translation of the Bible), with its tendency to substitute abstract notions for verbal proposition about God, paraphrases the good news of Is 52:7, "Your God reigns" into "The Kingdom (Reign) of your God is manifested. It is this tradition which is reflected in the N. T. usage of the expression, "the kingdom of God" which is said "to come", that is, what already exists is manifested effectively.

We find the same promise in Is 40: 9-10:  
Get up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of good tidings;  
say to the cities of Judah,  
"Behold your God!"

Here again the Targum paraphrases the expression "Behold your God" as "The Kingdom of God is manifested." The prophet Micah also speaks of the day of Gods' reign (4: 6-7).

Other prophecies of the Book of Consolation speak of the proximity of Gods' salvation (Is 46:13; 51:5; 56:1).

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12. Cf. J. Dupont, *Beatitudes II*, pp. 99-104.

Jesus' proclamation that "the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk 1: 15 = Mt 4:17) is a continuation and extension of this prophetic hope.<sup>13</sup> In many forms Jesus repeats this good news of the nearness of God's kingdom (cf. Mk 9:1 par; Mk 14:25 par; Lk 17: 20-21; Mt 6:10 par; Lk 11:2). Jesus' proclamation goes even further: the kingdom of God is already come. In Jesus' ministry God is already beginning His reign. It is the inauguration and guarantee of God's eschatological intervention (cf. Mt 12:28; Lk 11:20). (The action of the Kingdom of God is actually visible in Jesus' ministry. What remains is only the final consummation hidden in the plan of God (Mk 13:32).

The first three Beatitudes, reveal particular aspects of the happiness that the coming of the Kingdom of God brings to the poor and the afflicted. "Consolation" (Mt 5:4) is a traditional technical term of prophecy for eschatological happiness. Satisfaction of the hungry (Mt 5:6; Lk 6:21) evokes the theme of an eschatological feast in the kingdom of God (cf. Mt 8:11 = Lk 13:29; Mt 22:1-10 = Lk 14:16-24; Lk 12:37; Apoc 7:15-17, inspired by Is 49:10).

The first Beatitude declares the poor blessed because "the Kingdom of God is (not 'will be') theirs."<sup>14</sup> It is true that the original Aramaic formulation would not express the copula ("is"), but the Greek translation faithfully reproduces the meaning of the Aramaic. The promise of the Kingdom of God however, has an essential reference to the final consummation in the future hidden in God. The tension between the future and the present, inherent in Jesus' proclamation, is reflected here also. In Mt 25:34 we see that the Kingdom of God which is prepared for the elect, and thus already belongs to them, is given to them effectively only on the day of the Judgement. The second and the third Beatitudes expressly refer the promise to the future. We have, then, also to say that the first Beatitude which refers to the same

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13. Cf. *op. cit.*, 105-115; from the immense literature on the Kingdom of God I shall mention only: J. Jeremias, *N. T. Theology*, pp. 76-121; R. Schnackenburg, *Gods' Rule and Kingdom*, Herder, New York, 1963; N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, SCM, London, 1967.
  14. Cf. J. Dupont, *Béatitudes II*, pp. 119-123.

group of disinherited people has a future perspective. Although the Kingdom of God already belongs to them by right, yet to enjoy its full blessing they must wait a little, until the final consummation. But the future is already begun and active in Jesus' ministry and his continued presence with his disciples (Mt 28:20). This is the guarantee and pledge of Christian hope. This is the good news of joy.

### Only the poor are blessed

In the proclamation, "Yours is the Kingdom of God", the emphasis lies on "Yours" placed at the beginning. If we take the Semitic substratum seriously, it means "Only yours." The kingdom of God belongs to the poor alone. We find the same thought in Mk 2:17: Jesus' call to the eschatological meal is only for sinners; the righteous are excluded. The same opposition recurs in various sayings of Jesus. God has hidden His mysteries from the wise and revealed them to the simple (Mt 11:25-26 = Lk 10:21). He opens His Kingdom only to children (Mk 10:14; Mt 18:3). Not the invited, but only the uninvited (the poor...) will taste the banquet (Mt 22: 1-10 = Lk 14: 16-24, note v. 24). While the lost son receives the father's kiss the faithful son is alienated (Lk 15: 11-32). Publicans and harlots precede (=take the place of) the righteous in the kingdom of God (Mt 21:31).<sup>15</sup> This opposition is particularly striking in the parallelisms of the Beatitudes and woes in Lk 6: 20-26.<sup>16</sup> Two groups of people are sharply opposed here: on the one side, the poor who are oppressed and exploited and despised, who suffer starvation and whose existence is best described as weeping and mourning; on the other side, the rich who oppress and exploit the poor, who live in wealth and luxury and whose life experience is rightly described as feasting and laughing. Jesus proclaims that a great reversal of situations will take place on the day of God's coming to rule, with which a new order is established, the Kingdom of God. This proclamation of Jesus is illustrated by the well known parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16: 19-31, note v. 25). Mary's Magnificat, the

15. Cf. J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-117.

16. Cf. J. Dupont, *Béatitudes* I, 299-342; W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, Berlin, 1966, pp. 139-145; H. Kahlfeld, *Juenger* pp. 35.

beautiful canticle of the poor Virgin, expresses the theme of the beatitude of the lowly, and the woe of the mighty with poetic charm (Lk 1: 46-55).<sup>17</sup>

We have noted above that it is not any particular disposition characteristic of the poor which makes them the special objects of God's favour. What is revealed here is rather God's predilection for His suffering children, which moves Him to offer them His Kingdom. But this is a free offer to which the poor must respond. A socially poor man who is a religiously bad man evidently will not receive the blessing of Gods' Kingdom. His evil disposition is not in any essential way connected with his poverty. In fact, the presumption is that the poor man who experiences his misery is also religiously better disposed to receive God's offer of salvation than the proud and arrogant rich. We noted above that the O. T. concept of *'anawim* has a religious and moral meaning. Moreover, we may not isolate the Beatitude of the poor from the context of the Gospel which demands from all the response of discipleship. Thus the religious disposition and response of the poor are evidently presupposed but not directly emphasized.

### Are the rich excluded?

Does Jesus exclude the economically and socially rich from the Kingdom of God? It is true that Jesus' saying, "Blessed are you poor, woe to you rich," as it stands in Luke 6: 20, 24, suggests a positive answer. But we must remember that Jesus' proclamation is a prophetic one, which paradoxically expresses the eschatological reversal of situations. It must be understood within the context of the prophetic tradition which Jesus is continuing. In this tradition the rich man is conceived also as an unjust man who oppresses and exploits the poor and the weak, and as an impious man who in his self-sufficiency does not need God, or even dares to challenge Him. How well history and our own experience substantiate this sad prophetic picture!

So Jesus' 'woe to the rich' is quite understandable. In this context we should recall his repeated warning against the dangerous nature of riches.<sup>18</sup> "No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and mammon" (Mt 6:24). "Do not lay up for

17. Cf. A. Gelin, *Poor*, pp. 91-98.

18. Cf. E. Neuhaeusler, *Anspruch*, pp. 170-185; H. Kahlefeld, op. cit., pp. 36-45; S. Legasse, *L'Appel du Riche*, Beauchesne, Paris, pp. 64-76.



yourselves treasures on earth... For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be" (Mt 6:19-21). The rich man is in danger of fixing his heart on his riches and of being unable to turn to God. So Lk 12:33 gives the advice: "Sell your possessions and give alms". The tragedy that befell the rich man precisely when he was ready to enjoy his wealth contains a serious warning (Lk 12:16-21). His life was a total failure, because he linked it with what was transitory. The power of earthly riches to frustrate God's word in the human heart is illustrated in the interpretation of the parable of the sower (Mk 4:18-19 par). The theme is expressed most carefully in Mk 10:23-27 par. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God" (v. 25.) Only the grace of God can make the impossible possible (v. 27). It is a solemn warning about the tremendous risk the rich man is facing, about the almost insurmountable obstacle that riches create on the way to the Kingdom of God. Jesus leaves open to the mercy of God the possibility of the rich man's salvation. Yet it takes away nothing from the severity of the warning to the rich that they should renounce their wealth rather than risk exclusion from the Kingdom of God.

Matthew's spiritualization of the first Beatitude was his way of answering the problem: whoever is poor in spirit, that is, humble and confiding in God, whether economically rich or poor, will inherit the Kingdom.

### **The kingdom of God – a vain promise?**

Those who suffer poverty, oppression and hunger are given the promise of the Kingdom of God. But it does not profit them economically and socially in the present. It is evident that the eschatological gift of God's Kingdom does not alleviate present human suffering and want by giving an abundance of material wealth. Of what use is such an apparently vain promise? It is true that the Gospel is not a program for social action; it does not envisage a paradise of luxury and abundance in this world. But Jesus' message of God's infinite tenderness and fatherly care for the poor and afflicted reveals the immense worth of these helpless people in God's eyes. This implies a challenging appeal to all the hearers of Jesus to share God's sentiments towards the poor and to do all in their power to relieve their suffering

and supply their material needs. In fact the famous parable of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) is the most powerful appeal to all to take care of the poor and the needy: "I was hungry and you gave me food... Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me". There are also other sayings of Jesus which recommend alms-giving (cf. Lk 11:41; 12:33; 6:30, 34, 35; Mk 10:21 par). Doubtless the universal acceptance of Jesus' good news will necessarily lead to a more just distribution of wealth and to the eradication of poverty that oppresses the majority of the human race. We see this illustrated in the idyllic picture of the early Christian community in which there was no needy person because [those who had wealth shared it generously with those who had not, moved by the communion of heart and soul that was characteristic of the believers (Act 2: 42 - 47; 4: 32 - 37). Jesus' message of consolation to the poor contains also a message of universal fraternal love and sharing.

But the final and total annihilation of suffering and misery will be achieved only in the consummation in which God's Kingdom will be revealed in all splendour. Then "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Apoc. 7:17). But this is a mystery hidden in the heart of God. It is only in absolute faith that man can receive this eschatological message of God's mercy. It is only in total surrender and abandonment to God's secret plan that we shall live in the hope of sharing in the future consummation.

For this absolute faith and total surrender to God's plan the poor have the example of Jesus and his first disciples.<sup>19</sup> We have only to recall the witness of the Gospels to Jesus as the poor man *par excellence*. Born of poor parents, in the misery of Bethlehem, the babe has to be taken into hiding to escape the persecution of a tyrant (Mt 1-2; Lk 1-2). As a young man he earns his living by hard labour (Mk 6:3). In his public ministry he "has nowhere to lay his head" (Mt 8:20). He was totally free for his messianic mission. His was a poverty for the Kingdom

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19. Cf. A. George, in: *DBS* VII, cc. 397-400; P. Gauthier, *Christ, the Church and the Poor*, Chapman, London 1964, pp. 63-64.

of God. He proposes himself as an example of humility of heart (Mt 11:29). Jesus enters Jerusalem as the humble Messiah (Mt 21:5). On the cross he dies in utter poverty and desolation.

The Gospels tell us that to follow Jesus his disciples abandoned everything, even their nets and boats, which were the means of their livelihood (Mk 1:16-20 par., Mk 10:28; Lk 5:11). This gave them total freedom to share fully their master's precarious existence and his mission for the Kingdom of God. Jesus demands renouncement of all from his disciples (Lk 14:33; cf. Lk 14:25-33). He told the rich man who wanted to inherit eternal life: "Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me" (Mk 10:21 par) Jesus demanded from his apostles whom he sent out on his mission absolute poverty and total abandonment to God's providence (Mk 6:8-9 par). So riches lose all value and meaning when compared with the precious pearl of the Kingdom of God (Mt 13:44-46). When Peter said to him: "Lo, we have left everything and followed you", Jesus declared: "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother, or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the Gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life" (Mk 10:28-30 par).

## Conclusion

Jesus' good news of the Kingdom of God to the poor has lost none of its actuality for the human race today, the vast majority of whom suffer poverty and affliction that undermine their human dignity. In this universal gloom the proclamation of the poor man from Nazareth rings out, challenging us to concrete action in favour of the poor. And the poor among us have the assurance that our Father in heaven looks upon us with infinite tenderness and that he will soon end our suffering and misery by establishing His eschatological reign over us.

# Poverty in the Church

The overriding concern of the Second Vatican Council was to make the Church relevant to the time in which she lives. This concern led the council fathers to a thorough investigation of the fundamental nature and mission of the Church. One of the significant results of the investigation was the rediscovery of the ideal of evangelical poverty as an essential dimension of the life of the Church and an indispensable pre-requisite for the realization of her mission in the world. To understand the full significance of this rediscovery we must go back to Christ himself and see what poverty meant to him and how it was related to his own life and mission.

## I. The mystery of Christ and poverty

When we examine Jesus' attitude to poverty we notice two things. On the one hand he was born poor, lived a poor man's life and died in poverty. The son of a poor carpenter, he had no desire to become rich or powerful. Most of his disciples were men of very humble origin and in following Jesus they even gave up what they had. On the other hand he was not a world-denying ascetic (Lk 7:34) who followed the ideal of a radical rejection of possessions such as we meet with in Buddhism. He did not seek to lead men away from the world as if they were disembodied beings unconcerned with the world and life in the world. From this it is clear that the poverty of Jesus was not motivated by a hatred of the world or by a supposed dichotomy between the material and the spiritual element in man.

That Jesus did not consider poverty, understood as a state of deprivation, a virtue in itself can also be seen from his attitude towards the poor, his sympathy for them and the solicitude with which he sought to help them in their needs. He came to bring the good news to the poor, i.e. the news of their deliverance effected by God's unconditional love for them. With his coming



"the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them" (Lk 7:22). What is reported here are, of course, first and foremost, signs of eschatological blessings. But 'eschatological' does not mean something purely other-worldly and unrelated to history. The miracles of Jesus are not merely empty symbols of a future reality but effective signs of final deliverance which has already begun to take shape in history. The poor are not to remain poor but must be liberated from their poverty and misery, and Jesus is one who has come to effect this deliverance.

However it would be wrong to suppose that Jesus' primary concern was to deliver the poor from their economic distress and that his poverty was just the result of this concern. The gospels lend little support to such a supposition. Jesus as he appears in the gospels is not primarily a humanitarian in the ordinary sense of the term. This does not mean that he was any the less concerned with man's life here on earth. On the contrary, he was as concerned with it as any one else. But looking upon the whole situation of man in a more radical and global way Jesus went to the very root of the human problem which he found to be not economic but religious. (This does not mean that he considered the former unimportant or less urgent). What was gnawing away the whole fabric of human life was man's separation from God and the consequent separation from his brothers. And he found that this was an established fact not only among the impious and the irreligious but also among the very guardians of God's law and the promoters of His cause: the Jewish religious aristocracy. Jesus was concerned above all with healing this mortal wound and with bringing men closer to God and to one another. That was his fundamental mission and everything else in his life is subsidiary to this one all-consuming passion.

To understand the deepest meaning and basis of Jesus' poverty therefore, we must follow the unfolding of his Messianic consciousness. Right from the beginning of his public ministry Jesus rejected worldly power and glory as a definite danger to the realization of his mission. The temptation stories (Mk 1:12, Mt 4: 1-12; Lk 4: 1-13) are a forceful statement of this rejection. The very position these accounts occupy in the gospels indicates

that what is reported here is something of decisive importance. It is the expression of a fundamental option of Jesus which set the tone of the whole of his life and determined the character of his ministry. He would not be the glorious Messiah whom people expect but the humble servant of God. He would not confuse the reign of God with the political success of Israel and seek worldly power as a means of establishing God's Kingdom. He knew that this would be a great stumbling-block for his co-religionists; that they would not accept him in his poverty and lowliness. But he would not remove that stumbling-block which was there only because their sense of values was fundamentally distorted. For, in their eyes the great ones were those who exercised power, who had the largest number of dependents, who wielded influence in society and enjoyed the greatest comfort and security. It was Jesus' mission to bring about a radical change in the very sense of values and the standards of judgment derived from it. Therefore instead of making any compromise in this regard he put his own life and the values governing it in sharpest possible contrast with those of the world. He "came to serve and not to be served" (Mk 10:45) and he would in no circumstances leave this position of a servant. Such is the meaning of his victory over the temptations.

But even this was not enough to dispel all misunderstanding. For the very idea of service can be so distorted and misinterpreted as to suit man's natural way of thinking. Anything including the most self-seeking and self-assertive act may be given the label of service. Men may delude themselves into thinking that they can be followers of Christ without having undergone a conversion of heart. So we see Christ taking great pains to drive home to his disciples that the service he is engaged in is not of the kind that can be done without leaving one's position of superiority. The beautiful scene of the Last Supper drawn by St John is very instructive in this regard. Jesus almost shocked his disciples by washing their feet, which was a veritable reversal of the existing custom and a sharp denial of man's natural way of thinking. Peter's reaction was immediate (13: 6-8). He would not have Jesus wash his feet. And there was certainly love and respect in this reaction. And yet it remains ambiguous. For Peter thought not only that he was unworthy of receiving such a service but also that it was unbecoming of a master to lower himself in

this manner. Here Peter's way of thinking parted ways with Christ's own. By lowering himself to that level the master did not cease to be a master. "You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am" (13:13), says Jesus. But it is not unworthy of a master to humble himself and be a servant.

This was already too much for the disciples to take in. But Jesus' self-revelation still remained incomplete. For he was not only the humble servant but also the suffering servant. The willing acceptance of suffering and sacrificial death involved in his mission was as essential to Jesus as it was incomprehensible and absurd in the eyes of the natural man. Both these aspects are clearly brought out by Mark in the context of the passion predictions (Mk 8:31-35). Jesus' prediction of the passion (v. 31) immediately provoked strongly felt disapproval on the part of Peter (v. 32) and for this Jesus rebuked him in unusually severe terms (v. 33). At first sight it would appear that the reaction of the disciples (expressed by Peter) was nothing but the expression of their love for the master. And there is truth in it. However the fact that Jesus rebuked Peter saying "You are not on the side of God but of men" suggests that more was implied here, not only love but also incomprehension and even a certain unwillingness to follow the way of Jesus. Commenting on this passage Nineham says "The very vehemence of their opposition is meant to suggest, that it is more than a matter of the intellect, more than a failure to understand what Jesus meant: the disciples did not want Jesus to suffer. And it was because it goes against the grain to be the followers of a Messiah who suffers instead of producing spectacular victories by an effortless exercise of power; it brings no Kudos, and offends the pride of the natural man. And judged by ordinary standards, there seems no point in the suffering and death of the Messiah. What is more, if it is the will of God that the Messiah should suffer, it might well be his will that the Messiah's disciples should suffer a similar fate; from that again the natural man shrinks. So by their reaction to Jesus' prophecy the disciples reveal even more clearly than before the truth about themselves, that their minds and wills are governed by the standards of this world, of the unredeemed, natural man."<sup>1</sup>

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(1) Nineham D. E., *The Gospel of St. Mark*, Harmondsworth, 1964, p. 226.

(Nineham: *St Mark*; Penguin books, 1964, p. 226) On the other hand we also see how uncompromising was the stand of Jesus. To Jesus Peter's attempt to dissuade him from the way of suffering was a reminder of the temptation he had to fight in the desert. He dispelled it with the very same words— "Get behind me Satan" and reasserted his will to give himself totally to the Father. His love for the Father is such that nothing, including suffering and death, can dissuade him from the path assigned to him by the Father.

In discussing the poverty of Jesus we have passed from poverty in the strict sense to suffering and death. But in doing so we have only been gradually moving towards the fountainhead of that poverty itself. For the ultimate source of Jesus' poverty was his unreserved self-giving to the Father for the sake of men and the climax of this self-giving was his suffering and death. It is at this point that the radical newness of Jesus' life comes to sharpest focus. Here we see most clearly that the fundamental principle governing his existence was not the instinct of self-preservation but self-giving love which manifested itself in sacrificial service unto the end. By such a life Jesus inaugurated a new mode of being in the world and a new hierarchy of values whose ultimate point of reference was not any convention but "the heavenly Father who makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt. 5:45). The poverty of Jesus was, in the last analysis, an expression of these values and of the freedom with which he gave himself to God and men.

## II. Poverty as an existential quality of our life in Christ

We have seen that the poverty of Christ is the expression of his total commitment to the Father and his self-emptying love for men. Now the fundamental law of christian life cannot be any other than the one which governed Christ's own life. Jesus himself has expressed this in unambiguous terms. After predicting his own passion he called unto himself his bewildered disciples and the crowd and said: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it and whoever loses



his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mk. 8:34-35). There is no question, then, of being a christian without denying oneself. But what does this mean? It is not just a question of some ascetic practices or of inflicting pain upon one's body to bring it under subjection. What is meant here is something much more fundamental. It is a question of surrendering one's whole self totally and unconditionally to the Father so that one is fully at his disposal in life and in death. To put it differently, the question is whether man, the embodied man with all that he has, belongs to himself or to God. He who renounces himself thus and follows Jesus has found a new centre for his life; it is no longer for himself that he exists but for God and by that very token for his brothers in God. In the same way taking up one's cross is not to be understood as a passive acceptance of suffering and pain, the inevitable difficulties and adversities of life, but an active willingness to follow the path of love and service and not to turn away from it in the face of difficulties which are bound to occur. What is required here is the attitude of Abraham who was willing to give up anything, if God so demanded - his wealth, his homeland or even his only son. And it must be noted that such a life is not the preserve of a small religious elite, but an ideal set before all. What we see here is the very heart of christian life as such.

Such being the fundamental nature of the christian call it is clear that there can be no christian life without the spirit of poverty. For, one who is in the grips of wealth can never be free for God. He cannot let God be truly God for him, cannot recognize His absolute claim on him, because he has something else in the place of God, i.e. wealth. But if one does not place oneself unconditionally at God's disposal, faith is but an illusion, something without any existential import or impact upon life. So, too, one who is a slave of wealth cannot be truly open and available to one's brothers. Having money as the criterion of value he will not even be able to recognize the dignity of the poor man, much less to respond to him in love. The spirit of poverty is, therefore, intimately related to the fundamental christian virtues of faith and charity and is, as such, an essential dimension of christian existence.

This, however, does not mean that all that is required is the spirit of poverty and that one may peacefully go on enjoying one's wealth provided one is interiorly detached from it. In the first place a spirit of poverty which does not manifest itself effectively in life is nothing but an illusion. For faith and charity which form the basis of christian poverty are not mere interior dispositions, but effective forces which transform man's existence in its entirety. The call to spiritual poverty immediately turns into a call to effective poverty in the face of one's poor brothers. The early christian community presents us with a striking example of how the spirit of poverty which is a necessary condition for faith becomes effective in life. "The company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common.... There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need" (Acts. 4:32-35) Even if it is granted that this picture of the life of the early Christians is a somewhat idealized one, we cannot but marvel at the transformation which faith wrought in them. They were "of one heart and soul" and this spiritual unity immediately manifested itself effectively on the plane of material possessions. "They had everything in common". (v. 32) This does not mean that there was a juridical transference of property. For what we see here is not the triumph of law but of the spirit of faith. "No one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own" (v. 32). Set free by faith from the slavery of wealth, they practised a charity which went far beyond a generous disposition towards others and the giving of alms. The owner of the property regarded his possessions as a common patrimony which he administered for the benefit of all, and those of his brothers who were in need had a claim upon what he thus administered.<sup>2</sup> If we are to understand the full significance of this we must view it against the background of the faith of the early christians. Faith implies the recognition of the absolute claim of God upon oneself and this means that one has renounced one's absolute claim upon

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(2) Dupont, J., *Etudes Sur Les Actes Des Apotres*, Paris, 1967, pp. 508-9.

oneself. I am not my own but God's and therefore what I have is not my own but God's. Viewed with the eyes of faith, therefore, no man is the absolute possessor of himself or his property. Everything belongs to the Father and man is only His trustee. But this recognition of the Father's absolute claim on me, on all that I am and all that I have, implies the recognition of all men as my brothers and of their claim upon me. The actual way in which this brotherhood found concrete expression in the form of "community of goods" was undoubtedly determined by the circumstances prevailing at that time. But it remains always true that no one who lets God be truly God for him, ie. no one whose faith is actual and living, can ever lay absolute claim to his own property as though he had no obligations towards his brother in need, except, perhaps that of almsgiving.

From the example of the early Church it is clear that evangelical poverty is a characteristic of the life not only of the individual but of the christian community as a whole. It is part and parcel of the willingness of the Church to accept the cross of Christ which is the source of her perennial vitality. The cross of Christ, of course, has to be understood for what it is. It does not mean suffering as such but perfect self-giving which refuses to bow its head before suffering and even death. It is the symbol of the victory of faith and love over the powers of this world, including suffering and death. The power which is at work in such faith and love is the power of God himself and it is manifested most clearly in human powerlessness. Even a cursory glance through the epistles of St Paul will enable us to realize how vividly the early christians were aware of this: "Strength is made perfect in weakness. Gladly, therefore, will I glory in my infirmities that the strength of Christ may dwell in me." (II Cor. 12:9). A Church which is conscious of her true nature and mission can never forget this law. That is why evangelical poverty is always an essential dimension of the life of the Church.

But the temptation of the old Israel dies hard—the temptation to confuse the reign of God with worldly power and influence. To see how actual it is we need only look into ourselves, into our parishes and dioceses, into the disputes that arise

within and between the christian churches, into the way our parishes, dioceses and even religious communities compete with each other in raising up imposing structures and above all into the criterion whereby we measure the greatness, success or failure of ourselves and others. But the result of succumbing to this temptation is disastrous. For to the extent to which this happens the Church is bound to lose her identity and distinctiveness and become nothing but a part of the world where the same standards of judgement and hierarchy of values are accepted as elsewhere. A Church so identified with the world is powerless to effect any radical transformation on the plane of life, at least not that transformation which Christ wanted to bring about. For the salt has already lost its savour and the 'leaven' its transforming power. She may look very impressive and influential in this condition. But such influence is worth nothing when it is a question of generating and communicating that new life in Christ, which is the very reason for her existence.

All this does not mean that the Church can exist without a material substratum. As Fr Congar says "The gospel does not dispense us from that realism which tells us how much a ton of cement costs or a year's study for a seminarian or a seminarian or a missionary."<sup>3</sup> The basic question is whether the world can still recognize in the Church the face of Christ who came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45). The Council has expressed this in clear and concise terms: "Just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and under oppression so the Church is called to follow the same path in communicating to men the fruits of salvation. Christ Jesus, "though He was by nature God...emptied himself, taking the nature of a slave" (Phil. 2:6) and "being rich, he became poor" (2 Cor 8:9) for our sake. Thus, although the Church needs human resources to carry out her mission, she is not set up to seek earthly glory, but to proclaim humility and self-sacrifice, even by her own example"<sup>4</sup>

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(3) Congar, Yves, *The Place of Poverty in an Affluent Society*, *Concilium*, Vol. V, No., 2, (1966), p. 38.

(4) *Lumen Gentium*, No. 8.



### III. Evangelical poverty and man's struggle against poverty.

We have seen that poverty in the sense of "being deprived of the necessities of life" is in no sense good in itself and that the fundamental motive of evangelical poverty is faith and charity. This means that, being born of faith and charity, christian poverty is both an incentive to fight against that poverty and misery which is an affront to the God-given dignity of man and a powerful factor which sets man free for this struggle. An ideal of poverty which does not impel a man to participate actively in the struggle against poverty can hardly be termed christian. As Fr Congar has said "It is not enough to discover and even to practise poverty in spirit in our relationship with God. It must be said just as forcibly that this rediscovery and this practice cannot be divorced from our conduct with regard to human misery, but are a necessary part of an effective commitment to the struggle against this misery...the very fact our relationship with God imposes obligations on us in our relationships with others: God obliges us to do something with regard to our brothers. 'He who says that he loves God and does not love his brothers is a liar.' (1 John 4:20) It is precisely because Christ submitted himself as a son to God his Father that he came down to our poverty and embraced it so that he could deliver us from it."<sup>5</sup>

But the struggle against poverty is a very complex affair. For, in the given situation, poverty is not only a question of hunger and thirst. It brings with it social disadvantages such as inaccessibility to higher education and even the denial of the dignity and freedom due to man as man. And these in their turn intensify poverty and makes it still more unbearable. This means that poverty not only drives the poor into a miserable condition unworthy of the dignity of man but also deprives them of the very means whereby they can rise above this condition. Owing to the close interdependence between men and nations this situation affects not only individuals but also communities and nations. What can the Church do in the face of such a tangled situation? The plain fact is that there is no ready solution

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(5) Congar art. cit. p. 35.

to the problem and all that she can do is to contribute her share to the common endeavour particularly as a catalyst and a moral force. The battle has to be fought simultaneously on different fronts and every where it has to be undertaken with a clear vision of the final end.

In the first place there are the immediate particular needs of the poor which call for an immediate response in the form of *ad hoc* help. Nothing can replace this form of service. No amount of talk about social revolution can fill a single hungry stomach which needs food here and now, or heal a sick man who needs treatment but cannot afford it, or protect a family which is exposed to the inclemencies of the weather for lack of housing. Therefore, charity in the traditional sense still remains a form of service as relevant as ever before. And a revolutionary impatience which forgets this may well be a subtle form of evading the sacrifices demanded by the concrete situation here and now. But it must be said as emphatically that such *ad hoc* help can never be an adequate response to the problem of poverty. For it is by itself incapable of effecting any radical change in the social position of the poor and this is precisely one of the main reasons of this continuing poverty. Without such a change the poor will always remain poor, perennially dependent upon the rich and this is precisely what those who exploit them want.

Therefore, to be effective, our struggle against poverty has to be aimed not only at particular cases of distress but also at the very condition of poverty and the factors which create and maintain it. As long as these factors are left untouched poverty will never be eliminated. Therefore if our love for the poor is not to remain a "lukewarm sentimental pap" as Marx called it, we should have the courage to make a determined effort "to fight the organizations and institutions which tend to consolidate and even worsen the impoverishment of the poor and to keep them in a situation of subjection and exploitation where they hardly have the wherewithal to maintain the miserable lives that serve to provide the capitalist machine which exploits them with the labour it cannot do without".<sup>6</sup> In other words we have to fight for changes in the very structures of society. It is here that

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(6) *Ibid.*, p. 37.

christian commitment to the poor becomes truly demanding. It is here, too, that evangelical poverty becomes most relevant in our struggle against poverty. For structural changes would require that those who were occupying a more favourable position in the old order give up certain advantages they enjoyed over those who were less favourably positioned. But one will never be willing to do so unless one knows the value of sacrificial service which is the very heart of evangelical poverty. Therefore, if the Church is to be able to fulfil her mission in this field, she will have to be prepared, like Christ, to become poor for the sake of the poor and this, not out of external pressure but because of her commitment to Christ. But the more wealthy the church is, the less she is likely to be willing to make such sacrifices. What is at stake here is something of decisive importance: It is a question of her fidelity to Christ and the seriousness of her concern for the poor.

Finally, the war against poverty has to be fought on a level much deeper than that of social structures. For, the root of the malaise lies not in structures but in man himself who creates and maintains these structures. In the last analysis it is the worship of money which works behind the exploitation of the poor by the rich. As long as this idolatry continues, as long as money is given the privilege of being the omnipotent master, no structural change can eliminate social injustice. The best such a change can do is to interchange the role of the exploiters and the exploited while leaving exploitation itself intact. If the situation is to change basically, money itself has to be dethroned from man's heart and given its proper place. And this requires a conversion of heart and a change in man's sense of values. The Church has a special role to play in this regard and this she will be able to do only if her own life is animated by the spirit of evangelical poverty. Thus, on all levels, christian poverty is intimately related to man's struggle against poverty. It is not only an existential quality of christian life but also an essential prerequisite for the realization of the Church's mission in the world today.

# Should the Church be Poor?

The answer to this question whether the Church should follow Christ who 'emptied himself'<sup>1</sup>, whether there should be a corporate witness to this *kenōsis*, is of utmost importance in the life and mission of the Church today. The question would have been irrelevant in the early Church which formed a fellowship of disciples, fully open to the demands of discipleship.<sup>2</sup> There were apostles who held the first place, prophets who held the second, teachers the third, and then those with gifts of miracles and of healing and of tongues<sup>3</sup>, but the first among them were as if the last<sup>4</sup> since these considered themselves ministers and servants of others<sup>5</sup> and all worked together towards the building up of the body of which they formed mutually supporting organs.<sup>6</sup> They were all united in heart and soul and none of them claimed any of his possessions as his own. They shared them with those who were in need<sup>7</sup>. This generous indifference to worldly goods rendered them completely free and selfless and ready for any service. They had no truck with people like Ananias and Sapphira, who were selfish and too attached to their possessions to part with them, unless forced by social pressures and only to the extent that they were forced.<sup>8</sup>

## The corporate witness of the early Church

As the Church spread throughout the Roman Empire, otherwise opposed groups of a heterogeneous nature were con-

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1. Phil 2:7

2. Mk 8:34-37; Mt 8:19-22; 10:37-39; Lk 12:33, etc.

3. 1 Cor 12:28

4. Mk 10:43-44; Mt 20:26-27

5. 1 Cor 9:19; 2 Cor 4:5

6. 1 Cor 12:27

7. Acts 4:32

8. Ib. 5:1-11



verted to Christianity such as the Jerusalem community of mainly Jewish Christians, Rome and Corinth of predominantly Gentile Christians, and Antioch, both Jewish and Gentile. Judging from our own standards, they would have been a motley crowd of Hebrews and Hellenists, Greeks and barbarians, masters and slaves, men and women of the most varied social origins and positions. But, though there were occasional tensions among them<sup>9</sup>, there was no rift or divergence of ideas; they formed a community of brothers, all one in Christ Jesus<sup>10</sup>. This unity was not merely professed but shown in deeds. When the Jerusalem church with her novel experiment of 'having everything in common' soon got into difficulties, probably because there had been no production in proportion to her consumption, other local churches rallied to her aid, collected contributions and sent them to the brethren in Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup> As in collecting contributions, so in fostering consciousness of the one Church, Paul played an essential part. 'One of the chief reasons, humanly speaking, why the Church which was quickly growing in extent, did not split, is to be found in Paul's theology, which made all the faithful vividly conscious of the unity conferred on them by God and which imperatively called for concord: the one faith in Jesus Christ the Lord, the one baptism knitting them into unity in Christ, the common sharing in the one eucharistic bread and thus in the Body of Christ whereby the many are themselves a single body.'<sup>12</sup>

### The rise in wealth and power

For two centuries and a half, beginning from 64 A. D., Christians were legally proscribed in the Roman Empire, with repeated outbreaks of the most savage and cruel persecutions. But the more the State tried to exterminate the Church, the more she grew in numbers. By the beginning of the fourth century freedom was restored to the Church throughout the Empire. This

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9. Ib. 6:1; 1 Cor 1:10-17

10. Mt 23:8; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11; 1 Cor 13:13

11. 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8:1-7; Rom 15:25-28;  
Acts 11:29-30; Gal 2:10

12. R. Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament*, Herder, 1965, p. 82

marked a turning-point in the history of the Church which the Christians of that time looked up to as a most providential arrangement. Consequently all confiscated properties were returned to Christians, and gifts and privileges began to pour into the Church – subsidies, tax-exemptions, donations of money and property, offices and powers, honours and titles. In Italy, as early as the fifth century, the Church is said to have become the biggest landowner. Bishops were placed at the head of the financial administration of towns, including food supplies and public works. In the course of centuries whole states accrued to Peter's successors. But popes and bishops were not a conspicuous success as civil governors or rulers. The history of their government is often a chequered one of expediency, servile dependence, shameful intrigues and open conflicts.

Pastoral ministries of the Church did not make a happy combination with civil governments. Sceptre and crown did not sit quite well in the hands and on the heads of pastors. Instead of attributing untoward motives to the Emperor Constantine and others<sup>13</sup>, the Church has still to confess, repent and do penance for not heeding sufficiently the Gospel warning against the dangers of riches and power: 'You cannot serve God *and* mammon'<sup>14</sup>; 'In the world rulers lord it over their subjects, but it shall not be *so* with you.'<sup>15</sup> Already before the end of the fourth century there were complaints about the immense possession of the churches and the luxurious lives of some of the bishops. It should however be admitted that care for the poor and the suffering was unprecedented, and the Empire was dotted with hospitals and charitable institutions in increasing numbers.

Symptoms of division in the church began to appear. East and West started pulling apart even before the end of the fourth century till matters reached a head in the eleventh. Because of

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13. Cf. Kaul Baus in *Handbook of Church History*, ed. H. Jedin & J. Dolan, Herder, 1965, Vol. I, pp. 429–430: The idea of a State necessarily neutral in religious matters in the context of a pluralist society, is an anachronism for the beginning of the fourth century.

14. Mt 6:24

15. Mt 20:25–26

the attractions of wealth and power attached to church ministries, many unworthy men crept into the offices of the pope, bishops and clergy. Occasionally there were rival popes and bishops. There had been numerous instances of nepotism, rivalry, intrigues, debauchery and simony. Reform movements were active, and protests and warnings could be heard of holy and courageous men who wanted a come-back to the spirit of the apostolic Church. St Bernard, for instance, wrote to Eugenius III (pope from 1145 to 1153): 'When the pope, clad in silk, covered with gold and jewels, rides out on his white horse, escorted by soldiers and servants, he looks more like Constantine's successor than St Peter's.' He likewise censured the pomp which surrounded bishops: 'They look like young brides on their wedding-day.'<sup>16</sup>

### Materialization of spiritual realities

This state of affairs naturally engendered ideas and attitudes which tended to blunt the minds of the people and sometimes blind them to the spiritual realities of the Church, and this tendency reflected adversely on her self-awareness, her ministries, ordinary teaching and even divine liturgy. In the East, however, a theology of the spirit-filled nature of the Church had been developing. On the other hand, in the West the conception of the mystery of the Church had been blurred. During the Middle Ages the *Church* in the West had come to be considered almost an anonymous entity, a juridical institution but with rights and privileges, and often a counterpart of the State. The *pastoral ministry* of the Church became a veritable 'government' with an elaborate 'law' and legal jargon, judiciary and executive so much so that in an emergency a 'canonist' had to be called in. *Power* in the Church matched that of the State. Pope Gregory VII (1073-81) went so far as to say, of course with good intentions, that the Church is 'mistress, not a servant', a view which happens to be the direct opposite of the Gospel directive: 'to serve and not lord it over'<sup>17</sup>. Extreme *centralization*, dating back from the Gregorian Reform, was resorted to by the papacy with the very good intention of extricating the Church from her subjection to secular

16. Cf. Yves Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, Chapman, London, 1964 p. 125

17. Cf. *ib.* p. 105

powers and thus effecting the needful conversion of the clergy from the evils of incontinence and even more from simony.<sup>18</sup> Feudalism could now easily percolate the Church structure. A list of innumerable *permissions* was drawn up, which were the prerogative of the pope and were 'granted' parsimoniously on application first to Bishops and then to the clergy and laity. On the other hand Christ said: 'Freely you have received, freely give.'<sup>19</sup> These words are even more applicable to liturgical celebrations. *Indulgences* were doled out piecemeal from the 'treasury' of the Church. *Prayer*, a communing with God, was often a set of stereotyped formulas and it did not matter even if they were in an unknown language and of very ancient make. This is even more true in the case of the holy *Eucharist* which had been, in the early Church, and should ever be, the greatest bond of union among us. At every step of it rubrics would be met with like recipes, and to make matters worse, stipends were attached to it. Whatever one might say for argument's sake, was it not mostly as a result of this practice that the Eucharist came to be celebrated at the same time in different corners of the same church by different priests mumbling set prayers sometimes in unintelligible accents with the congregation divided among them, and often without the least awareness of their being knit together into a brotherhood? And on the part of the people were there not till recently those who 'heard' several masses one after another or all together as if Christ were divided into the various masses and the unity were to be realized piecemeal? These are the more notable of the materializations of supernatural realities, resulting from the Church's love of mammon and power-seeking. She was almost projecting an image of a religion of material things, losing credibility in her spiritual mission and making less impact in her evangelization.

### The gospel ideal

Man's existence is a co-existence. He is by nature dialogal<sup>20</sup>. He knows himself and grows to his stature through his fellowmen.

18. Cf. ib. pp. 104-5, 58-69

19. Mt 10:8

20. Cf. G. M. A. Jansen, *An Existential Approach to Theology*, Bruce, Milwaukee, 1967, pp. 1-9; also Gregory Baum in *The New Morality*, ed. W. Dunphy, Herder and Herder, 1967, pp. 158-164



God revealed Himself to man in accordance with his dialogal nature. He wants to redeem mankind not individually, but as one people, as a community<sup>21</sup>. His redemption in Christ establishes relationship with Himself as well as with men among themselves. The Trinitarian love-life that Christ earned for men by his death and resurrection does not shut them up in themselves, but necessarily opens them out to others. Christ wants his disciples – and he calls all men to be so – to be a Church, a communion which would be a sacrament of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race<sup>22</sup>. Hence his tirade against the rich and riches and his serious warning against power in so far as they mar the harmony in the Church by their accompanying anxiety, greed, arrogance, self-centredness, division and conflict. As material goods are limited and imperfect, they cannot be totally possessed together by more than one man nor can they perfectly satisfy the possessor. Thus they cause division among those who struggle to possess them. Only the spiritual can unite men. Grace is essentially unitive. Christ did not want any man to be destitute. His heart melted at the sight of the poor<sup>23</sup>, and he wanted his 'little flock' to 'sell their possession and give alms'<sup>24</sup>. That is to say, they should be sufficiently detached from all worldly possessions and share them with the needy. Besides Christ wants his Church to proclaim the presence of the Kingdom of God of which she is the sign and the seed<sup>25</sup>. God's Kingdom and His righteousness have to be sought first<sup>26</sup>. Only a corporate witness can convince the world of the presence of the Kingdom and it is especially through the Church's right attitude to worldly possessions that this witness is borne<sup>27</sup>. She must be completely rid of the spirit of possessiveness and domination<sup>28</sup>. Material goods should foster love and help build up brotherhood among men and that is what is implied in Christ's demand to 'sell what you have and

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21. Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 9

22. Cf. *ib.* 1

23. Cf. Mk 8:2; Mt 15:32

24. Lk 12:33

25. Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 5

26. Mt 6:33

27. Mt 6:25 – 32

28. Cf. Mt 19:16 – 22; Mk 10:42 – 45; Mt 20:25 – 28

give it to the poor'<sup>29</sup>. Paul was vehement against the discrimination shown by the rich towards the poor in Corinth during *agape* held in connection with the Eucharist. He uses strong words of condemnation, and exposes its shamefulness by reminding them that they have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. He wants them to understand that it is contrary to the disposition of faith and fraternal love required for the worthy sharing in the Eucharist, and he hastens to correct the abuse. He also takes this unfortunate behaviour as a test-case to distinguish genuine Christians from the false who are no Christians at all<sup>30</sup>.

### Conditions in the present-day Church

What is the kind of image that is projected by the Church today? Undoubtedly there has been renewal in the Church after the Second Vatican. But has she come up to the Gospel ideal? Why is it that there are people today who hold Christ and his Gospel in high esteem, but not, at the same time, the Church and her teachings? Are they justified in distinguishing Christianity pure and simple from the Church enmeshed in socio-political structures? Has there not been considerable transformation in the Church with regard to the theory and practice of freedom, law, authority and obedience, primacy and collegiality, centralization and the autonomy of local churches? Whenever there is talk of Church renewal, usually there come up two views: those who preside over the Church stress renewal of individuals, while others renewal of the Church (as an institution). Both are urgently needed, but as regards people living within a structure, entangled in it, it is often the latter kind of renewal that must precede which would be more in the nature of a corporate witness.

### The Church of the poor

Because of the deviation from the Gospel ideal<sup>31</sup>, and this still persists in some measure, she must 'empty herself' lest she should misrepresent Christ and twist his Gospel. Her Lord and master, 'though he was in the form of God,... emptied himself,

29. Mt 19:21; Lk 12:33

30. Cf. 1 Cor 11:17-34

31. Cf. Vatican II, *Dignitatis Humanae*, 12

and took the form of a slave'<sup>32</sup> for our aske. These are powerful words which should shame the Church into a poor Church, emptied of all luxury, pomp and display, of all superfluities and excesses of worldly possessions, of all honours and titles, and rights and powers. They should shame the Church into a servant Church that does not set herself up on a par with the State, entangle herself in power politics, resort to political strategy and intrigues, indentify herself with any political party or align herself with the rich and the powerful. Ah, there is the rub! Then she may have to tread the way of the cross like her Lord and Master. She can easily turn the other way round under the pretext of preserving her institution(s). But Vatican II proclaims that 'the Church does not put her trust in privileges granted by the State... She will even give up the exercise of certain rights which have been legitimately acquired, if it becomes clear that their use will cast doubts on the sincerity of her witness or that new ways of life demand new methods.'<sup>33</sup> For she knows too well how her close links with the rich and especially the State have reduced her credibility among the vast masses of people who are exploited and oppressed. 'Unfortunately, modern history has shown up the great Christian sin: that Christians can in a way be said to be guilty of a massive abdication from their task of proclaiming a "structural redemption" and to have concentrated on exhorting the faithful to individual conversion leaving evil embedded in social structures.'<sup>34</sup> Though the Church can never be perfectly satisfied with anything less than absolute justice and absolute love, the Council has shown how cooperation between the Church and State is possible and meaningful. But here the Church can easily take the line of least resistance by allowing herself to be co-opted into the programmes of a State involved in exploitation and oppression. She should be free from fear and not resort to expediency so that she may exercise her prophetic function of passing moral judgement on political and social affairs.<sup>35</sup>

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32. Phil 2:6-7

33. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 76

34. José-María Gonzáles-Ruis, *Concilium*, Vol. 6 No. 4, p. 29

35. Cf. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 76

**Institutional witness**

A few questions on the Church's institutions seem to be relevant here. She cannot disown overnight hundreds of thousands of them which serve the poor and the suffering. But then are they wholly dedicated to the service of those for whom they were started? Or do those for whom they were started exist for the sake of the institutions? Are the institutions only a palliative? Or are they a cover for maintaining the *status quo*? Is there a question involved here of prestige, of rivalry, of scoring firsts? Do the institutions get at the basic problems that bedevil society today? These are extremely important questions which clamour for immediate solutions lest doubts should be cast on the sincerity of the Church's witness. Without indulging in mutual recrimination or leaving responsibility to others, and with everyone doing his utmost, the whole Church, official and non-official, has to repent and be converted, make amends and go the way of the Spirit and not count the cost. The first thing Jesus requires in his disciples is an emptiness that God can fill.

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# Religious Witness to Poverty

The changing forces of life in our day have blurred the image of the religious for the faithful at large. This has precipitated a search into the theological meaning of the religious vocation. The one simple explanation of the past has faded away and now new lines of thought about the significance of the religious life in the Church are emerging.

The same forces have drastically changed its structures and, as a result, the religious of today have got to find a sense of security in their vocation within themselves. They each need a clear satisfying vision of what a religious vocation is and this has deepened the search for light on the real meaning of a religious life.

Among all the lines of thought perhaps none has developed so strongly as that of 'witness to the Gospel'. Whether one can fully explain the distinguishing features of the religious life by the idea of witness is open to discussion. But in practice, this idea has emerged very strongly in the actual consciousness of the religious.

It is a strange commentary on our age that the idea of Christian witness needs to be explained to us. This idea, so vital and so dominant in the early Church has gradually been obscured by a vague 'good example'. The sharpness of the challenge of real witness to the conscience of the religious has been dulled by a practical emphasis on "service" in education, medicine and the social field. Witness of "life" has stood dimly in the background. Evangelical witness is the radiation of Gospel values from the very person and life of an individual. It is not simply the power to speak the Gospel message clearly and well. It is not just a fidelity to Gospel values in one's own life. It is a radiation of the Gospel from us. Christ said, "You are the light

of the world" (Mt. 5:14). Brightness goes out from a light by the very inner dynamism of the light itself. Witness means, to cry out the Gospel with our lives. Since Pope Paul VI wrote 'Evangelical Witness in the midst of the people of God', this idea of witness to the Gospel as a very significant part of the meaning of the religious vocation has taken on a new importance. Pope Paul challenges the consciences of all religious on their duty of evangelical witness.

Effective witness demands two things. We must be one with the people to whom we witness. They must see our lives clearly. And yet we have to be different. It is precisely through the difference that we, as it were, attract attention to ourselves. To blend both identity and difference is not an easy thing to do.

To apply the idea of witness in the area of religious poverty sharpens this difficulty very greatly. A basic reason is that 'poverty' is a word very relative in meaning. The poverty of some 20th century people would have been affluence in the 16th century. The poverty of people of the affluent nations of today would be riches to poorer nations. What many religious in all sincerity call 'poverty' is far from poverty in the eyes of millions of their countrymen. This relativity of the meaning of poverty lies at the heart of all discussions on the question. As long as we were able to work out the meaning and demands of poverty in an isolated way, the problem was not too great. We could have our own meaning for 'poverty' and then, we would just have to see to it that our actual style of life adequately expressed the Gospel ideal. But an emphasis on witness changes all that. We have to look outwards to the people as well. We have to take their idea of poverty into account, and also the actual impact of our way of living on them.

Pope Paul insists strongly on this in "Evangelical Witness". In fact, he begins his analysis of poverty thus: "You hear rising up, more pressing than ever from their personal distress and collective misery, the cry of the poor." (17)

In seeking the significance of religious poverty, his starting-point is not our ideas but "the cry of the poor." He says, "on this point of poverty), our contemporaries question you with particular insistence." (16)

Religious poverty, like every other attitude of religious life, is an intensification of some basic Christian attitude. The impact of the Kingdom of God on a man results in a certain attitude to the good things of God's creation. Through and in Christ, a man becomes a child of the Father and a member of God's family of brothers and sisters on earth. Now he begins to look on creation with the eyes of a son and a brother. He sees the beauty of creation not just as 'beauty' but as something that reveals love – that serves love. All creation is a gift, where God reveals His Love to His children. Creation communicates love to us and helps us to share it with our Father in a human way. Through and in creation, I can live a life of sharing, of creative work, in love with my brothers and sisters. "Things" serve "love" to reveal it, to help us to share it, to give love a way of being creative. The experience of the Kingdom of God gives a man a certain attitude to life and things. Being *in Christ* becomes the basic value of a man's life and all others range around it to serve and promote it. Now, one of the great ways open to Christians to show forth their experience of God's Kingdom is the use of the goods of life. They are gifts of God's love, to be accepted from His hand in love, to be used in love and for love with others. "Gifts of love to be shared in love" – the religious through poverty takes up these two values of the Kingdom and intensifies them. He tries to make them into a way of life, into a life-style, so that he may bear witness to the Kingdom in the world.

To give an explanation of religious poverty in theory is not hard, but to face this question is: "Is the present life-style of religious an effective witness in our world to the Gospel attitude?" It is around this question that all the discussion on religious poverty revolves today.

Some may still hold that the major question is our own inner attitude to the goods of this world. If that is truly Christian, they say, it will shine through our way of life – even though this may not qualify for the title "poor" according to the minds of people.

Some say that our life-style is an "anti-sign"! Our whole life-style removes the hard realities of budgeting and of living

within an inadequate salary from the mind and care of the individual religious. And this is the very reality of the poverty of people today. The religious life-style offers security to the individual. He need not worry about food or clothing or lodging. Poverty today is mostly insecurity in these very same things.

Some say that it is quite impossible for us to witness effectively to poverty as long as we continue in the life-style and the type of service we have inherited from our predecessors in religious life. As long as we remain in certain types of service, we will need a big institution and efficient modern equipment. Nothing will ever persuade people then that we are 'voluntarily poor' when they see the size of the institution and the amount of equipment. We may talk about being poor and we may personally lead really poor lives, but people will never be impressed.

The question is a very complicated one for religious of today. Many communities have been involved in the running of large institutions of service for many generations. They were founded and built up in an age when they really were a witness to the love of the Gospel. They have been handed down to us and have become today our present duty. The education and the health of thousands are dependent, even today, on these institutions. Can we walk out of them lightly, without further thought of the people's actual needs? The work in them must be efficient and effective according to modern standards, yet this places us at once on the side of the "haves" in the minds of the people. We are not classified with the "have-nots".

The question is so complicated that some feel, we can never settle it. It would be better, they say, to give up "poverty" as an ideal and to make "community sharing" or "a common, simple life" the object of our vow and the description of our way of life. Perhaps, we will have to wait for history to solve this problem. Our institutions may just be taken away from us by Government decision, and we will be free of the burden and the duty and can start afresh to witness to poverty.



In the light of all this, the contribution of Pope Paul VI on Evangelical witness to poverty is very interesting. He does not attempt to decide this issue definitively but he gives practical directives which point out to us some very effective ways of witness. In No. 17 of the Exhortation on Religious Life, he reminds us that Poverty is "a call to love." Our loving approach to people and their needs will be a very effective witness, even if the theoretical question remains unsolved. In No. 18 he gives us four ways of witness—viewed from this angle. "How will the cry of the poor find an echo in your lives?" First: "that cry will bar you from whatever would be a compromise with any form of social injustice." We may be very much aware of the social injustices in our surroundings. I feel we are. But we may be tempted to compromise with social injustice just because of the sheer weight of the problem. "No compromise" are exactly the words on which we should focus our attention. We should show the world that we reject all forms of compromise here and that we take a brave and absolute stand for full social justice. Those who work for us should receive a genuinely just wage. Those who work for us should receive human and considerate treatment. How right Pope Paul was to use the word "compromise"! How often we have heard of teachers being "asked" to donate part of their salary to some fund, of fictitious names appearing on rolls, of girls working hard all day and every day just for their keep. Surely effective witness is called for here. Secondly, Pope Paul says, "It obliges you to awaken consciences to the demands of social justice made by the Gospel and the Church." Religious today through the very institutions that are a problem, can stir up the consciences of people about the evils of social injustice. People need to be awakened to the crying sin of social inequality and human exploitation. They so often take it for granted as an unavoidable part of the social set-up. They are like the rich man in the parable, who did not notice Lazarus, the beggar. He just took him as part of the scene. People need to be shaken out of their complacency to have their consciences awakened and we have a splendid chance to do this if we would only have the courage.

Thirdly, Pope Paul says, "It leads some of you to join the poor in their situation and to join their bitter cares." That is beautifully put. The impulse of witness can lead some religious

to enter and live in the very life-condition of the totally poor. Pope Paul does not make it a law for all. But he makes it absolutely clear that those who feel called to this and do it are really following a genuine path of witness. They are not to be classed any longer as dreamers and idealists, or as people who make empty and useless gestures. They should be encouraged, not discouraged. Their action does not point the finger at those who do not feel called to follow them, and it should be given the recognition that it deserves.

Fourthly, Pope Paul says, "It calls many of your institutions to re-dedicate for the good of the poor, some of their works." This is a neat reference to the problem of institutions. He urges us to re-think our whole set-up to see if we could, within the present framework, come up with a better way of helping the poor. It is a fact of life, that many of us believe that the way we are now serving people is the only one and the best way to serve them. Institutions are run on the lines laid down for them fifty years ago. Fifty years ago, they did wonderful service. They still do service, but people have changed and so has the world and soon the service may cease to be service at all. All Pope Paul asks us to do is re-think. We have to ask ourselves some straight questions. "Are we really helping the way we think we are?" "What do modern sciences teach us here?" "Could we do better if we arranged our service differently?"

Pope Paul's last point is that witness calls us to "a use of goods limited to what is required for the fulfilment of the functions to which you are called."

The problem of a truly effective witness to poverty remains, but Pope Paul has indicated very clearly the lines along which something really effective can be done here and now. The suggestions which we have so far referred to, have to do mostly with our social life and responsibility. It would be interesting to look at his suggestions for witness within our personal lives also.

They are mainly three. The first comes in the form of a question. "In a civilization and a world marked by a prodigious

movement of almost indefinite material growth, what witness would be offered by a religious who let himself be carried away by an uncurbed seeking for his own ease and who considers it normal to allow himself without restraint or discernment everything that is offered to him?"(19) The preference for a simple life, where the joy of living is found in simple things is truly the Gospel attitude, where things are not just sought for themselves, but in the wider context of a life of love for God and others.

His second suggestion for our personal lives is linked with the first. So many people are caught up in "an implacable process of work for gain." "It will therefore be an essential aspect of your poverty to bear witness to the human meaning of work which is carried out in liberty of spirit, work restored to its true nature as the source of sustenance and service."(20) A spirit of joyful work, a readiness to work for loving motives rather than merely for gain, shows again that things are meant to serve love.

His third suggestion points to the witness found in our life of sharing in common. "Poverty really lived by pooling goods, including salary, will testify to the spiritual communion uniting you. It will be a living call to all the rich and will bring relief to needy brothers and sisters."(21) And it is in this sharing that he sees "the character of dependence which is inherent in every form of poverty."(21)

Simplicity of life, sharing of all things, a spirit of work - these would represent lines of effective witness today. But they also point, I think, to a theory of religious poverty which future generations may be able to work out more fully. It is not so much the presence or absence of all material goods that constitutes evangelical poverty. Evangelical poverty consists in using the goods of life as a son of the Father and as a brother to all men. The Father creates. So it is a joy for us to share His creativity in our work. To be brothers in sharing what we have, be it little or plenty, is far more important than to cling to what we ourselves need and like. And a simple life, freely chosen, is something which people notice. We are not driven by the demands of material

life or moved by its attractions. The great value of our life, in the light of which everything else is evaluated, is Christ, the whole Christ, Jesus and His brethren gathered together in one Spirit. "The full sharing in community of a simple, creative life" – could be a new definition of religious poverty.

We have to be grateful to Pope Paul for his contribution to our thinking on the problem of witness in religious poverty. His insights are practical, helpful and challenging. But it would be a mistake to think that they have solved the total problem and closed the question. We have to go on searching, evaluating and experimenting, until we know more fully what the Spirit is asking of us in our times.

Bangalore

F. B. Connolly



# Wealth and Power and the Catholic Church in India

How can the witness of the Church in India become clearer and more credible? Obviously, by patterning itself on the witness of Jesus. The clarity and credibility of Jesus' mission and witness were due in large measure to a style of life marked by poverty. His preference for poverty acted as a pointer to a set of values different from those usually coveted by our short-sighted selfishness. Jesus became poor for our sake; he emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave; He worked as an artisan, as a village smith or carpenter, to earn his daily bread.

In comparison with him, foxes and birds fared better: they had holes and nests while he had nowhere to lay his head. He chose to associate with the poor, for theirs was the kingdom of heaven. From their midst came all or most of his closest friends (2 C 8. 9; Phil 2. 7; Mk 6. 3; 1. 16-20; Mt 8. 19: 5. 3).

This tradition was continued by his Spirit for several generations in the building of his Church, so that what Paul said of the Christians of Corinth could be said of the whole Church of the early centuries: "Few of you are men of wisdom by any human standard; few are powerful or highly born... (God) has chosen things (people) low and contemptible, mere nothings, to overthrow the existing order." The mother of Jesus had already given expression to this revolutionary preference of God when she said.

"He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly.

The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich he sent empty away."

Jesus has only words of woe for the rich and for those who have their fill now. They have from him the warning that it is harder for them to enter the Kingdom of God

than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. They are therefore called upon to share their wealth with the poor and to come closer to them. For it is for the poor and the down-trodden that the Gospel is meant. Announcing it to them is both the goal and the proof of Jesus' divine mission. (IC 1. 25-31: Lk 1. 52-3; 6. 24; 12. 33; Mt 19. 23-26; 11. 1-6; Lk 4. 18).

It was to be the same with his Church. Poverty had to be the main mark of the Church's outreach to the world. "Take nothing for the journey", Jesus told the twelve, "neither stick nor pack, neither bread nor money; nor are you each to have a second coat." To the seventy-two he said, "Carry no purse or pack, and travel barefoot." That would of course prevent the Church from pushing and jostling for places of honour and from seeking to curry favour with the rich and the mighty. That would leave her free to speak the Word in its fulness without having to suppress large areas of it to suit the interests of patrons (as was to happen in all colonial missions). She has been instructed by her Lord to "go and sit in the lowest place", and seek out and mingle with the lost and lonely masses of men so cruelly dishonoured and used by those that wield wealth and power. It is not friends and relations and rich neighbours, but "the poor, the cripple, the lame and the blind" that should become her preoccupation (Lk 9. 3; 10. 4; 14. 7-14).

The 1971 Synod of Bishops reflected this attitude of the Gospel when, in its document on Justice in the World, it wrote: "In reference to temporal possessions whatever be their use, it must *never* happen that the evangelical witness which the Church is required to give become *ambiguous*. The preservation of certain positions of privilege must constantly be submitted to the test of this principle...our faith *demand*s of us a certain *sparingness* in use, and the Church is obliged to live and administer its own goods in such a way that the Gospel is proclaimed to the poor. *If instead the Church appears to be among the rich and the powerful of this world, its credibility is diminished.*" (see *The Tablet*, December 1971. italics added).

We are therefore permitted, even expected, to ask how the matter of poverty stands with the Church in Italy or India or any where else; what credibility she enjoys with the masses;

and what clarity or ambiguity surrounds her witness and her mission to announce the good news to the poor. Our view for the present is restricted to the Catholic Church in India. What is said here has been culled and crystallized from personal observations as well as from numerous interviews with men and women both Indian and foreign in origin, working in various capacities in different parts of the country. Three remarks may be in order at the outset: The first is that we can offer here only the general impression or the overall image the Church seems to project. Such pictures may not be 'scientifically' exact, but, like works of art, they reflect authentic truth sometimes more fully, often more tellingly and humanly, than 'scientific' propositions do. Secondly, the vastness and variety that is India warns us against expecting even general descriptions of Indian realities to find uniform verification in every part of the country. The third remark is that since, along with the nation, the Church too is in a process of rapid change, the portrait we draw may, as days pass, call for continuous modifications. Our prayer is that much of it may soon become dated.

## II

Is the Catholic Church in India, then rich or poor? Is she with and for the poor, or is her position ambiguous? On surveying her institutions, projects and style of life from Srinagar to Kanyā Kumāri, what impression does she convey in terms of wealth and power, of influence and command, of poverty, transcendence and service of the neediest? But this question can be meaningfully put and this survey truly made within the situation of poverty and wealth in the country as a whole. As the situation is well known only a few indications by way of reminder are given here.

Even according to official documents, close to 50 per cent of the 550 million people in our country live below the poverty line; that is, without having quite 68 paise (1961-62 prices) with which to buy food for the day. Two-thirds of Indian workers, including all agricultural ones, fall in this class. The Planning Commission knows that in 1972-73 the monthly per capita consumption expenditure of the bottom 30 per cent of the rural population has been Rs. 22. 90, and of the urban poor, Rs. 25. 17. Nearly two-fifths of the total industrial consumer goods go

to a mere 10 per cent of the people. "The top 10 per cent urban rich consist of the big bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, and the salaried class", the new elite in public, commercial and educational services, those in government administration, the managers, consultants and the highly-paid employees on the staff of banks, insurance companies, university colleges, and similar institutions; the top 10 per cent of the rural rich are the big and medium landlords and the rich peasants. A 1960-61 study showed that the top 12 per cent of households owned 61 per cent of the total land, and only the remaining 39 per cent was left for 88 per cent of the people. Statistics of this kind could be multiplied to substantiate the conclusion that "a large section of the population ranging between 40 and 50 per cent of the total population lives in abject poverty. At the other extreme, a small rich section lives in affluence and, due to the productive relations, is able to use a major chunk of national resources for its own comfort and well-being" (G. S. Bhalla, *Causes and Cures*, in Seminar No. 167, *Garibi Hatao*, July 1973, pp. 19 and 20), "It is indeed doubtful if persons who cannot afford to spend Rs. 40 (at current prices) a month on themselves or Rs. 20 at 1960-61 prices can even be called poor, for poverty implies a certain dignity. Most of them have no dignity. For many it is hard not only to get enough to eat but also to have a place where they can cook or sleep. They are not poor, they are degraded. ... Most of the 220 million people here who, according to the planners, make do on a monthly per capita budget of less than Rs. 40 today have yet to graduate to poverty. Anyone who spends a day in the *chawls* of Bombay or, worse, in the *bustees*, of Calcutta, can see with his own eyes what degradation means. People have to wait in long queues, sometimes for hours, for a bucket of water. For lakhs it is a daily ordeal to find a place where they can sit... Millions have no homes. They live, cook, sleep and breed on pavements. Some take to a life of crime... All these people have yet to graduate to poverty. There is something altogether arbitrary about the way the planners draw the poverty line at a per capita budget of Rs. 40 a month... The definition of poverty can have no meaning unless the planners try to be more specific and find out how much a family of four or five needs to be able to live without feeling deprived all the time... families which spend even Rs. 200 a month at the present prices can only live miserably" (Sham Lal, *Ending Degradation*, in Seminar No. 167, pp. 23 and 24).



## III

The Catholic community in India is not particularly rich. It is composed mainly of middle and working class men and women. It has little or no influence on the industrial, trade or other economic policies of the nation. Its control over the resources of the country is negligible. This is not suprising since Catholics make up scarcely 1.25 per cent of the population, and the majority of them come from the lowest economic strata. There may be individual Catholics in Assam, Meghalaya, Kerala or Bombay city or elsewhere who belong to the top 15 or 20 per cent of the people of the land. Considerable sections of the community in these places may be upper middle class. The rest are poor, or even find themselves below the poverty line.

But the impression given by the organised Church seems to be one of wealth and power. To Indians at large the Church is represented by, and known through, its institutions and its leadership. These are mainly responsible for the image of the Church that has been projected. And this image is one of affluence. The truth of the impression is brought home to anyone who contemplates the complex of colleges, schools, theological institutes, seminar centres, technical institutes, churches, cathedrals, convents, religious houses, hospitals and dispensaries, together with their landed property in Bangalore, for instance, or in Kerala, or in Poona, Delhi, Bombay, Madras or Krishnagar. The Church in India has 104 university colleges, 22 major seminaries, over 1320 secondary schools, more than 310 hospitals, 460 or more dispensaries, besides many sanatoria and leprosoria, numerous technical institutes and printing presses and innumerable primary schools as well as a few hundred development projects, some of them of considerable size. The financial investment in these well-built and ably maintained institutions and projects with their staff, vehicles, equipments and organisation, can only be calculated in crores which mount to staggering heights. Some of these, especially in north India, are situated in the finest cantonment areas, which is proof that they have come to us as privileges from colonial times.

One of those interviewed, a missionary and sociologist from the West, said: "We always give a picture of affluence. This is true also of our missions. I know because I have lived there,

and I know what the people think when they see our buildings, vehicles, the kind of food we eat, the clothes we wear, the servants we have and the cultural amenities we possess, our films, cameras, taperecorders and projectors." People look upon the Church as a privileged group and a higher class, and quite fail to understand clerical talk about ideals of poverty. They know that the parish priest has the best houses in the locality, and that the missionary has much money at his command.

This last remark points to one of the most salient facts about the Church in India. This small group, unlike most other groups and communities in the land, seems to have at its disposal inexhaustible resources in men and money. If it is not itself rich except in its institutional wealth, it has rich relations abroad, who deal in millions and are unstinting in their generosity. Misereor, Missio, Caritas Internationalis, Catholic Relief Service and the Roman Congregations are among the many powerful western organisations which keep giving by the million for the Indian Church's educational, social, developmental and ecclesiastical programmes. One of my contacts who is in a position to know the facts says that out of the 40 or so crores of rupees that yearly come as aid from abroad to private agencies, at least 25 crores must be in favour of the Catholic Church. The total cash aid rendered in 1972 by Caritas India alone amounts to more than Rs. 5.3 million. To this must be added material aid received and distributed in the shape of clothing, milk powder, medicine, medical equipment and ambulances. During the period 1965-72 Caritas India has funded development projects in various dioceses of India to the tune of more than Rs. 23.8 million. Numberless are the development, training, building relief, emergency and other projects and programmes initiated and supported by the various funding agencies of the West. Thus the Church appears to be an unusually rich dispenser of benefit and welfare all over the land, and not one of the poor and struggling sectors of humanity.

An impression of affluence is also created by the style of life of the Church's leadership. Its idiom and rhythm are different and distant from those of the surrounding masses of men in matters like food, clothing, celebrations and travel. Somehow the clergy are not touched as a rule by conditions of scarcity or famine. When they are ill, said one of those I interviewed, they

get the finest treatment in the best hospitals by the ablest doctors; and even the rarest medicines are ordered from abroad by cable flown in by plane in a matter of hours. All this is beyond the possibilities even of the moderately rich. A further aspect of wealth and of a superior style of life is what has been named lazy leisure. There is an idea that the clergy can afford to work comparatively little and yet live at a fairly high level of culture and comfort.

The director of India's National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre sums up the situation rather trenchantly: "The Church has projected an image of affluence though on the whole it is poor, though it depends on others for resources and aids, and though exigencies of efficiency require flexible structures and adaptable forms of life" (D. S. Amalorpavadass, *Preaching the Gospel Today: Main Problems in Mission Lands*, in *Word and Worship*, May-June 1973, p. 157).

#### IV

True, efficiency goes with resources, at least a certain kind of efficiency does. And the Church is rich in both. And with these go power and prestige. But it is to her credit that her wealth, efficiency and organisational skill have nearly always been used to render service rather than to build up power. In most Indian villages some money and a measure of influence is often a necessary condition for effective service, to defend the rights of the poor and the outcaste, to secure for them a minimum of goods and of dignity. In many places, owing to the wealth and prestige of the Church, people have been helped, the poor have been educated, houses built for them, work created, cooperatives organized, and men liberated and given hope and a future.

All the same, it would have been quite miraculous if the Church had in no manner fallen under the spell of the power placed in her hands by her wealth expressed in institutions and projects involving the life and destiny of thousands of men and women. In her colleges and secondary schools alone she is in a position to exercise influence on about two million young people and some 50,000 teachers. Many of these are prestige institutions to which at the time of admissions there is great rush, an index

perhaps of their potential in terms of privilege and power. A little study will show that this power is, as a rule, used to safeguard and expand the institutions themselves and their privileges, to secure with ease from men in high positions (whose children's presence in schools gives them a hold on the parents) what the ordinary man can scarcely obtain even at great cost in time and trouble, be it building material, railway reservations, permits of various kinds, speedy customs clearance, extra rations or the dropping of cases of scooter accidents! One can succumb in many ways to the temptation of power. The tendency obtaining in the Church's educational and other institutions to dictate everything instead of listening and consulting and respecting responsible initiative is one of the symptoms of unnecessary and unhealthy power. The position of staff who may have incurred the displeasure of a clerical or religious principal is often wholly defenceless. They are at the tender mercies of one person except where fear of government action or of a teachers' association or a student strike intervenes to curb arbitrary show of power. There is the complaint that young lady teachers in convent schools are not seldom given scanty respect and treated almost as office-girls. What treatment then may fall to the lot of office-girls?

One of those interviewed, working in the field of the Church's education at an all-India level, said: "The reaction of several principals to any suggestion of change or reform is, 'Why are you bothering us? We are doing well, we produce 100% results. Parents are satisfied and we have friends among government officials. Why do you bring new ideas? An autonomous school cannot be touched. It is a power, it goes its own way, it can defy instructions and appeals unless students take matters into their own hands. But students have been tamed by them to fit nicely into their scheme of things.'" Apologies are perhaps due to principals, but they will surely understand that we are only sampling patterns of power at work in the Church. The person just quoted went on to point out how participation in management is poor and prospects of it are meagre in all Church institutions since any measure of decentralisation would mean the sharing of authority for which there is little readiness yet. Hence positions of influence and authority are as a rule reserved to clerics and religious who need not undergo the ordeal of interviews and selection as others have to before their appointment.



The question may be posed if our stand-offish separateness in running institutions and organising services and our failure to seek collaboration from other groups and agencies does not spring from a secret attachment to power, the concern of which is not so much that people be served as that they see the service as coming from *us*. A further question would be if it is not our power, our ability to do things and get things done, that attracts men to signing up with us through baptism in many a mission rather than the light and fragrance of our faith and life as the disciples of Jesus. A missionary interviewed said that often we are respected and approached as Sahibs rather than as Sadhus. People love to belong to a powerful group rich in resources. This is true at least in cases (not so rare) in which people once enrolled in the privileged group, begin to exert power on the missionary himself, to make demands and to threaten to leave unless the demands are met. Dom Franzoni, the Benedictine Abbot-Prelate of St Paul's outside the walls said in a recent statement that the Church apparatus in Italy appeared as a worldly power in close link with the mighty. This is only partially true of the Indian Church.

## V

For an organised movement and an institutionalized Church some wealth and power are perhaps unavoidable, perhaps indispensable for efficient service. But the nature of the Church's mission and the poverty and material powerlessness which distinguished Jesus' own witness urge us to some critical reflection. A first point on which reflection would be worth-while is the kind of efficiency that responds to the gospel and the mission of the Church. Not all efficiency is of the same cut and size. Efficiency in a democratic tradition differs from what it is in a totalitarian set-up. It is one thing in a value system in which man is the main concern, and another in a system in which results and rules and the system itself are the central reality. India's concept and experience of efficiency need not be the same as those of Germany. There can be a religious and human efficiency distinct from one that is exclusively technical, mechanical and economic. Our acknowledged and admired efficiency may have to be re-thought and re-evaluated in relation to the Church's essential goals within the concrete context of her life

and work in this country. The point is vital and delicate, involving as it does the question of clarity as to ends and means, as well as honest judgement on established ideas and positions.

A second point for reflection would be how and whom our resources and influence serve? What causes and values do our presence, activity, institutions and projects support and promote? We are at least beginning to realize that our prestige schools with high rate of fees and English for medium of instruction cater mostly to the highest class and equip them to consolidate their acquired positions of power and privilege; while the rest of our educational institutions give a training too old and faded to be of real significance for today. That means that in an area where the Church is deeply involved with money and men, its social influence as hope for the masses and as hope for change towards better structuring of life is small. It is easy to see our educational institutions, sometimes on account of their very excellence in traditional ways, as bulwarks of the *status quo* and as a drag on change. As we have seen 50 per cent of India's population live in abject poverty while a small rich section live in affluence 'like an island in a sea of misery'. There are scholars who are convinced that "the educational system, public services, and numerous institutes of technical education exist in effect to perpetuate this duality" (G. S. Bhalla, in Seminar No. 167, June 1973, p. 19). We should ask how wise and evangelical it is for the Church to use her resources in a manner that amounts to upholding this duality, and obscuring the message of the Gospel. In the village the wealth of the mission is used for the poor and for their defence. But when these poor take a look at the city they are shocked to find the Church there serving and equipping precisely those whom she is fighting in the village. This ambiguity of our service must come in for fresh scrutiny.

Thirdly the Church's having rich relations abroad and being actually wealthy have consequences that call for thought. Lavish aid from rich churches does not allow challenge and pressure to develop here. As a result indigenous inventiveness and effort will lack stimulus, and native resources will lie untapped. There is perhaps no more agreeable way of keeping the Church perpetually dependent and underdeveloped. Already there are huge establishments and projects begun with foreign funds which

the Indian Church can scarcely hope to support alone. Within India itself, a rich church's habit of distributing aid has in many cases created or perpetuated deep-seated dependence in the recipient poor, thus counter-balancing the work of Gospel of liberation. The aid-situation also creates friction: some missionaries are rich and others are poor, and no one without rich contacts would like to succeed one whose purse had been always full and open. Availability of plenty of money for a song or for nothing has been a temptation to which not a few have succumbed. It has indulged the greed of many and the passion to build which is as old and as imperious a passion as sex. That is how so many buildings have been constructed by church people all over India at fantastic cost, though they were unnecessary, though they lie idle most of the time, though for some of them some use had to be invented after putting them up, though millions in this country have no home and live in filthy slums and eat garbage. They are built because they are symbols of power and of successful competition. Power which has no time to identify real needs and no mind to respect them once they are identified. But perhaps the gravest danger lurking in free foreign funds is that the Indian church may come to feel itself too obligated to be free to criticize and protest against the imbalance, injustice and exploitative character of the economy from which the funding nations draw huge profits, particles of which are then offered us as alms; or to be free to urge the hierarchies of these countries to press their governments for more equitable conditions of trade and aid for the nations on the road to development. The justice and restitution aspect of all aid-funds must be emphasized afresh so that these may not become a sop to the giver's conscience but a new tool to sensitise all to the un-gospel character of the existing social order. Mother Theresa for instance needs all available international and national prizes and awards; she can put them to excellent use. But at the same time they must, somehow, become a means of protest as well as being aimed at preventing further creation of the evil she is grappling with.

Fourthly, the question whether funds should go to the rich to help them get richer or to the needy to help them become human, whether services should go to the powerful to make them mightier or to the weak to enable them to liberate themselves, is of some

moment. Nearly 25 per cent of the Caritas India funds of 1965-72 went to four out of the eighty-five (that is, some 5 per cent) ecclesiastical divisions in India. The principles of distribution followed by Caritas are (1) need and backwardness and (2) ability to use funds which include personnel with skills and well-defined projects. Skill is often absent where need is greatest; where need is less more skilled personnel are available. In practice therefore the second principle becomes the rule and on this basis the rich are enabled to grow richer and the needy are left in the lurch. Real service would consist in training men to skills among the needy and giving them a start. Without a full scheme of that kind Caritas may remain a rich alms-giving agency and a friend of those who have power. Rich dioceses and religious congregations, rich in money and in skills, have recently argued that the need to use their skills remained to be fulfilled. Greed apart, each situation may have to be studied in the concrete, but in any case priority should be given to the betterment of the neediest.

For various reasons, then, the general impression seems to be that the Church in India as an institution is wealthy and affluent, powerful and influential. Her witness is thereby more or less obscured, hindered or twisted. Re-thinking is necessary on her style of life and relationship at all levels of leadership, the thrust and scope of her institutional involvement, the structures that create and continue domination and dependence, the attitudes which obstruct collaboration, the tendency to overlook the needy except in emergencies, and the hesitation to take a clear stand for the poor masses of the land and for structural changes that would enable them to claim their freedom, their dignity and their share of the good things of life.

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# The Ideal of Poverty in the Religious Traditions of India

Poverty<sup>1</sup>, understood as the voluntary renunciation of the good things of this life for the purpose of attaining *mukti*- or *mokṣa*-, is a typical feature of India's religious tradition. In fact, Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina monks give up, of their own freewill, worldly goods and embrace a life of privation and hardship. It is the purpose of this paper to study succinctly the idea of poverty, its presuppositions and significance in the religious traditions of India. Needless to say, in this short essay it will not be possible to do full justice to the topic we are setting out to study, and the method of approach we intend to follow all through is the philological and historical one. The investigation is, then, a purely theoretical one, and no endeavour shall be made to offer practical suggestions or proposals for the Christian believer's living of the life of religious poverty in the Indian context.

1. The word poverty is derived from Latin *paupertāt*- (cf. *paupertātem*) via Old French and Middle English *poverté*, and the Latin form itself goes back ultimately to the Indo-European base *pōu*-, "to be small, little" (with special reference to the young ones of animals). By the addition of the extension suffix *-ko-* the stem becomes, in classical Latin, *paucus*, and *pauper* is really a contracted form of the compound *pauco-paros* (rather than of *pau-paros*), literally, "inheriting little, possessing little." Littleness, insignificance, and lack or paucity of possessions are basic to the root in question here. Perhaps, the reader may find it interesting to learn that the common Sanskrit word *putra*-, "son," is a derivative of this root and represents the formation *pu-tlo-s* (with the change of *l* to *r*, *putra*-). For the various terms denoting poverty, cf. C. D. Buck, *A Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages* (repr., Chicago, 196), § 11. 52) p. 783).

## I

The Sanskrit word that corresponds to the English term poverty is *dāridrya-* which, as will be shown in the course of our discussions in this part, is representative of a long process of semantic evolution. The individual who is in the state defined and described by this noun is *daridra-*, but, curiously enough, this designation is never used of those who have undertaken a life of voluntary poverty. In the Indian tradition such men are known as *bhikṣu*<sup>2</sup>, or *sādhu*<sup>3</sup>. There is, too in Sanskrit the appellation *yācaka*<sup>4</sup>, but a religious mendicant is seldom if never,

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2. This term occurs in Pāli (i.e., the language of the Buddhist scriptures) as *bhikkhu-* and serves as the official designation of the Buddhist monk who earns his livelihood by begging. It is derived from the stem *bhanj-*, which in its turn goes back to Indo-European *bhe(n)g-* *bhreg-*; this latter form of the base survives in Latin *frangō*, Gothic *brikan*, Old High German *brehhan*, Modern English *break*, etc. The full sense of the appellation *bhikṣu-* must be clear from its etymology, and in actual practice the individual thus termed is also a poor man.
  3. In Sanskrit there is the verbal base *sādh-*, derived ultimately from Indo-European *sē(i)dh-*, "to go direct to the goal". The *sādhu-* is therefore the one who tends straight to life's supreme goal. The meaning of our noun will become still clearer if we remember that Greek *ithus* (cf. English *ithyphallic*), from Indo-European *sādhus*, and meaning "straight, direct, straight course, a direct attempt, purpose", is etymologically related to *sādhu-*. Of course, one who is hastening without deviation to his goal need not necessarily be poor in the strict sense, though in actual fact he remains a poor man.
  4. That is, one who is asking, requesting. The Indo-European base of this word is *yek-*, "to speak solemnly," or "to request humbly; "the suffix *-ka*, which is the Indic variant of the parent languages *-ko*, serves to create agent nouns, and accordingly *yācaka-* is the person who humbly asks others for what he needs. Compare Tocharian *yask-*, "to desire, to beg", and *yāṣṣuce*, and *yāṣṣuca*, "beggar..".

called by this name, though in point of fact he is expected to eke out his meagre living through begging. Our investigations in this part will be confined to *daridra*- and its cognates.

From the grammatical point of view, our term goes back to the verb *daridrāti*, an intensive formation<sup>5</sup> which literally means "to run, make haste, hasten hither and thither" (of course, looking for something one needs or does not possess), and it is ultimately derived from the Indo-European root *der*-<sup>6</sup>. Through the working of the law of accentuation<sup>7</sup> there have arisen from this base the stems *drā*-, *dre-m*- and *dr-eu*-, stems actually occurring in Greek, Sanskrit, etc. Let us examine these formations carefully.

The third stem, formed by the addition of the extension *eu*-, survives in Sanskrit under the form *dru*- (*dravati*)<sup>8</sup>, meaning "to run, hasten, flee;" it occurs nearly forty times in the *Ṛgveda* in conjunction with a number of prefixes which quite naturally serve to add fresh nuances to the basic sense here indicated<sup>9</sup>. The second formation, characterized by the presence of the extension *-m*-, too, survives in Sanskrit in the form *dram*- (*dramati*), "to run about, roam, wander," but it is never part of the vocabulary of the first Veda:<sup>10</sup> its survivals may be seen in Greek

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5. Cf. J. Wackernagel - A. Debrunner, *Altindische Grammatik* II/2 (Göttingen, 1954), § 215. i (p. 343).

6. Detailed list of correspondence and forms in J. Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* I (Bern, 1959), pp. 204 - 6.

7. This is of course too complicated a matter to be discussed here.

8. The root survives in such river names as Sanskrit *Dravanti*, Illyrian *Dravos*, Italic *Traent*- (with change of *d* to *t*), Gallic *Drueutia*, etc.

9. Exhaustive list in H. Grassmann, *Wörterbuch zum Rigveda* (4th ed., Wiesbaden, 1964), cols. 647f.

10. Compare the river-names *Dramme* (from *Dromyā*), *Dremse* (from *Dromisā*), *Drama*, and *Dramatica*. Sanskrit attests too the intensive formation *dandramyate*, "to run hither and thither."

*e-dram-on*, *de-drom-a*. *drom-os*, etc.<sup>11</sup> Finally there is the stem *drī-*, occurring just a couple of times in the Ṛgveda,<sup>12</sup> with the sense "to run, hasten," and metaphorically, "to pray to the gods," and used in conjunction with prefixes. In the classical languages it has the meanings just indicated, but what is still more important is the fact that it has given rise to the intensive formation *daridrāti*, "to run hither and thither, be in need and want, be poor." To the type of formation in question here we may compare Greek *di-dra-skō*, and *dra-nai*.<sup>13</sup>

As for the word *daridra-*, it can be an adjective or noun; the sense accordingly will be "strolling, roving, poor, needy, deprived of," and finally, "tramp."<sup>14</sup> one who wanders about because of need, poor beggar." and the peculiar state in which the person who is *daridra-* finds himself is *dāridrya-*, "poverty, indigence, penury, the state or condition of being in privation." Here belong too the forms *daridratā-*, *daridratva-*, etc., with the senses just indicated.

In the light of our discussions we may now summarize as follows the semantic evolution of *dāridrya-* in Sanskrit. The original sense of the root was "to run hither and thither," of course, looking for something one has need of or does not have in his possession. From this basic sense there evolved the nuances "to be in need of something, to be in want, to be poor." Etymologically, therefore *daridra-* is the tramp, the wanderer, the vagabond!

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11. All the forms convey the idea of running, moving quickly or briskly.
  12. Cf. Grassmann, *op. cit.*, col. 646.
  13. The first form is a reduplicated present (comparable, say, to the Latin perfects *di dici*, *po-posci*, and the like) and the next one represents the second aorist.
  14. This term is etymologically related to *daridra-*, inasmuch as it represents a formation from the root *dre-* with the extension suffix *-b-* and nasalization for the sake of emphasis. In Gothic there is *ana trimpan*, to which are related Middle High German *trampen*, *trampeln*, *trumpfen*, and English *trample* and *tramp*. In ordinary parlance the tramp is one who wanders about from place to place in search of work, or as a vagrant. He is, by definition, poor.



The tramp by definition is a person without the means of decent livelihood, and the *daridra*- thus becomes the poor man, the beggar, the (religious) mendicant. We bring our discussions to a close with the observation that *daridra*- and *dāridrya*- do not have in Indian tradition that specific sense which we associate with the Hebrew terms 'anī, 'ānāw, and 'anāwāh,<sup>15</sup> or with the New Testament Greek terms *ptochos* and *ptochēia*.<sup>16</sup>

## II

From the historical point of view the concept of religious poverty is something alien to the earliest form of Aryan tradition and culture as represented by the Ṛgveda and the Avesta.<sup>17</sup> The great reformer and prophet Zarathushtra, for example, never had any regard for the ascetic ideal, the voluntary renunciation of the good things of this life for the sake of the joys of the world to come. As the well-known Belgian Iranist Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin observes, "He suggests no renunciation, he preaches the maintenance of life... No vows of chastity and poverty with the Parsees! Each individual has the duty to found a home and to work the earth... His religion all but tells him,... 'Grow rich'..."<sup>18</sup> When we turn to the earliest sections of the Ṛgvada, we find there an outlook on life that is quite akin to the one recognized by the prophet from Iran. The Vedic Aryan is not a man of renunciation, privation, poverty, denial of the enjoyment of the good things of this life; on the contrary, he is bent upon getting the maximum of pleasure from this world, and he therefore earnestly prays to the gods to grant him all the material blessings

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15. Compare the discussions in the study on authority and poverty in the Bible.
  16. From the Indo-European base *pet*- (cf. Latin *petere*, Sanskrit *petati*), *ptā*-, "to fall down."
  17. That is, the Zoroastrian scriptures.
  18. Cf. his work *The Hymns of Zarathustra* (Boston, 1953), pp. 160, 161.

he can ever think of.<sup>19</sup> As any reader of the first Veda will avow, the element of petition is most conspicuous in it.<sup>20</sup>

The above observations should now be complemented by some other considerations drawn from the sources at our disposal for the study of ancient Indo-European and Indo-Aryan culture. The first element we wish to emphasize here is the practice of *tapas*—<sup>21</sup>, which is clearly documented in the *R̥gveda*, and which is part and parcel of the common Indo-European heritage, for, as a matter of fact, the Indo-Europeans of antiquity were quite familiar with the theory and practice of magico-mystical 'heat'.<sup>22</sup>

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19. On the element of petition, cf. T. Elizarenkova, "An Approach to the Description of the Contents of the *R̥gveda*", *Mélanges d'indianisme à la mémoire de Louis Renou* (Publications de l'Institut de civilisation indienne, fas. 28, Paris, 1968), pp. 255-68.
  20. Here are some petitions in which material blessings loom large: "May one obtain through Agni wealth and welfare day by day, which may bring glory and high bliss of valiant offspring": "O Agni, be of access to us, as a father to his son. Stay with us for our happiness" (1:1:3, 9); "Let us partake of all booty that is highest and that is middle...; help us to wealth that is nearest" (1:27:5); "Fill (us with) wealth... Thou art lord over glorious booty" (1:36:12). All the citations here are from H. Oldenberg, *Vedic Hymns II* (The Sacred Books of the East, vol. 46, Indian repr, Delhi, 1967).
  21. This common word is really Indo-European *tepos* (neuter), "heat," from the base *tep-*, "to be warm, hot" (cf. Latin *tepeō*, *tepere*, "to be warm"). It corresponds to Latin *tepor* (originally *tepos*, but later on with final -r through rhotacization). Compare Hittite *tapashsha-*, "heat, fever," and Avestan *tafnu-* (mas.) and *tafnah-* (neut.), "heat, fever." We may adduce here also Sanskrit *tapati*, *tāpayati* (causative), and Avestan *tāpaiti*, *tāpayeiti*.
  22. Johannes Hertel has repeatedly emphasized this point; cf. particularly his monograph *Die Sonne und Mithra im Awesta auf Grund der awestischen Feuerlehre dargestellt* (Indo-iranische Quellen und Forschungen, Heft 9, Leipzig, 1927). He even goes to the extent of interpreting the term *bráhma*-

Etymologically considered, *tapas-* means "heat, ardour," and in Indian religious tradition it has become a technical term denoting asceticism – ascetic effort or practice – in all its comprehensiveness,<sup>23</sup> though in the Indo-European tradition as such it was essentially part of the technique and ideology of magic. This is clear, for instance, from Old Norse mythology, according to which the first human couple was born of the sweat of Ymir;<sup>24</sup> there is too an Iranian myth wherein Ahura Mazda<sup>25</sup> is said to have created man by causing the body of Gayōmart to emit sweat.<sup>26</sup>

In this connection mention must be made of the discovery of Georges Dumézil that terms such as *furor*, *ferg*, *wut* and *menos*, which formed an integral part of the vocabulary of Indo-European *Heldendichtung*,<sup>27</sup> convey the basic idea of heat, energy, rage,

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in the light of this concept of heat; cf. his paper, "Das Brahman," *Indogermanische Forschungen* 41 (1923) pp. 115–209.

23. This idea goes back to the age of the *Ṛgveda*, for in some of the late hymns *tapas-* means ascetic endeavour. Cf. Grāssmann, *op. cit.*, col. 523,
24. In Old Norse mythology the story is told of the slaying and dismemberment of Ymir, which is a very good parallel to the myth of *puruṣa* in Indian tradition. There is a detailed discussion of this in G. Dumézil, *Mythes et dieux des germains – essai d'interprétation comparative* (coll. "Mythes et religions," vol. 1, Paris, 1939); *Les dieux des germains: essai sur la formation de la religion scandinave* (coll. "Mythes et religions," (vol. 38, 2nd ed., Paris, 1959).
25. That is, the god preached by Zarathushtra (or Zoroaster). The name means "the Wise Lord" (*ahura* = *āsura*).
26. There is a monograph on this myth, viz, S. Hartmann, *Gayōmart. Etude sur le syncrétisme dans l'ancien Iran* (Uppsala, 1953).
27. That is, poetry having as its theme the heroes of the past and their exploits. Exhaustive discussions are found in R. Schmidt, *Dichtung und Dichtersprache in indogermanischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden, 1967), pp. 61–141. For a good summary of Dumézil's views, cf. (in addition to n. 24 above), C. S. Littleton, *The New Comparative Mythology. An Anthropological Assessment of the Theories of Georges Dumézil* (Berkeley, Cal., 1966).

frenzy, fury, and the like. As these terms can contribute to a deeper understanding of the particular point in question here, a brief discussion of their meaning may be quite in place. Latin *furō*, from Indo-European *dhuso*,<sup>28</sup> means "to rage, rave, be out of one's mind, be mad", and *furor* is raging or raving in sickness or under the influence of violent passion. According to the ways of thinking of the Indo-European peoples, the hero is the one who is moved by strong passion and is in a state of fury. Greek *menos*, from the base *men-*,<sup>29</sup> corresponds to Sanskrit *manas-*, and has the meaning "rage, passion"; and the dative form *menei* is used adverbially, with the meanings "violently, furiously." Old Irish *ferc* (Middle Irish *ferg*), etymologically related to Greek *orgē*, "anger, passion, wrath" and to Sanskrit *ūrja-*, *ūrjā-*, "power, strength", also conveys the idea of anger, fury, and the like,<sup>30</sup> and finally Old High German *wuot* (Modern German *wut*)<sup>31</sup> means "inanimus, furiosus." The four terms we have examined here—all of them inspired by the ideology of heroism of the Indo-European peoples—establish beyond the possibility of doubt that the concepts of rage, fury, passion, heat etc. were basic to the culture of the ancient Indo-European world. The conclusion that forces itself upon us is that the endeavour to produce magical heat, or in other words, some sort of austerity and asceticism, was an integral part of the Indo-European heritage that the Aryans brought along with them as they entered and settled down in India, and in their new home this tradition quite naturally underwent a remarkable development.

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28. Indo-European *dh* become *f* in Latin; compare Sanskrit *dhuma-*: Latī *fumus*; *s* between vowels is changed to *r* (rhotacization; cf. n. 21).
29. The general sense of this base is "to think, be spiritually (mentally) awake, active", cf. Hittite *me-im-ma-i* (*memmāi*), "he says!"
30. The base is *wer-*, with the extension suffix *-g-*; hence *werg'-*, "to swell" (e.g., with power, fury, rage). In Greek tradition *orgē* is passion, anger, wrath, fury (cf. *orgy*, *orgiastic*).
31. This term is etymologically related to Latin *vātēs*, "seer, prophet". On the significance of the root *vat-* in Latin, Sanskrit, etc., cf. P. Thieme, "Die Wurzel *vat-*", *Indogermanische Dichtersprache* (Wege der Forschung, Bd 165, Darmstadt, 1968), pp. 187–203.



The reader should realize that it is not possible, in this modest essay, to sketch even briefly this process of evolution. For our purpose it will be sufficient to refer in a cursory manner to two varieties of ascetic life held in the highest esteem by the people of the late Vedic times. The first type, described in RV 10:136<sup>32</sup> is represented by men who are called *munis* and *keśin-*,<sup>33</sup> are dressed in yellow robes. The gods enter into them, and they go into a frenzy and ecstasy, in which state they even mount upon the winds and fly through the air. They can abandon their body and even drink poison, without, of course, being harmed. Here we have, then, a special type of ascetic, well known from later tradition.

The next group we wish to mention here is the special type described by Book XV of the Atharvaveda, and known as *Vrātyas*.<sup>34</sup> There is no reason to doubt that these men were ascetics, for they used to perform such practices of austerity as standing for a whole year, regulation of breath, etc. They wore turbans and wore black garments. They carried two ramskins, one white and the other black, hanging from their shoulders, a pointed stick, and an unstrung bow. What strikes us as something extremely odd is the fact that in their wanderings they were accompanied by a cantor and a prostitute.<sup>35</sup> This mysterious group of religious men,

32. Cf. J. W. Hauer, *Die Anfänge der Yogapraxis* (Stuttgart, 1922), p. 170.

33. The first term means "enthusiast, sage, seer, ascetic, hermit, especially one who has taken the vow of silence." It is etymologically related to Greek *mundos* (*mu-nd-os*). "dumb", Armenian *munj*, Latin *mūtus*, Sanskrit *mūka-*, etc. The second noun is a formation from *keśa-*, "hair", whose etymology and parallels are not altogether clear.

34. Detailed discussions in Hauer, *Der Vrātya. Untersuchungen über die nichtbrahmanische Religion Altindiens. I: Die Vrātyā als nichtbrahmanische Kultgenossenschaften arischer Herkunft* (Stuttgart, 1922); short discussion in M. Winternitz, "Die Vrātyas," *Zeitschrift für Buddhismus* 6 (1925) pp. 48-60, 311f.

35. The former is called *māgadha-*, "the one from Magadha", and the latter *pum̐scālī-*, "the woman who moves (*calī-*, from *cal-*, *calati*) after men" (*pum̐s-*). On this second form, cf. Wackennagel-Debrunner, *op. cit.*, § 250 g (p. 403).

according to modern authorities, should be regarded as śaivite ascetics, precursors of the yogins, and even as ascetics belonging to the non-Aryan, indigenous populations. Be that as it may, the Vrātyas were wedded to a life of austerity, and if they were accompanied by prostitutes, it was only because even sexual orgies were counted as an integral part of man's religious life.

It would be a serious mistake to fancy that all the ascetics of the Vedic age were men who indulged in sexual excesses; on the contrary, there were men who practised *brahmacarya*- and lived a celibate life in all its purity and rigour, but this topic has no relevance to the present paper. Coming now to the post-Vedic period, we learn from the sources at our disposal that there were many groups of ascetics who lived a life of need, privation and austerity, and used to roam from place to place. In the age prior to the appearance of the Buddha and Mahāvīra,<sup>36</sup> when the Gangetic basin had become the centre of Aryan culture, there were numerous ascetics who gave up the world so as to enter unencumbered and unhampered upon the quest after deliverance. These men were known as *śramaṇas*.<sup>37</sup> The Brāhmins were, as was their practice, engaged in the performance of ritual and the study of the Vedas, but those who were dissatisfied with the formalism and externalism of the times either devoted themselves to abstruse speculations or adopted an eremetical form of life. The *śramaṇas* were distinct from all other groups; they were ascetics, *parivrājakas*,<sup>38</sup> men who had renounced everything,

36. For a good introduction to this period, cf. A. Bareau, *Die Religionen Indiens* III (Die Religionen der Menschheit Bd. 13, Stuttgart, 1964), pp. 7-10.

37. Etymologically, from the base *śram-*, "to strive, endeavour, be tired," and the suffix *-ana* which serves to create agent nouns. The Indo-European base is *klem-*, surviving in Sanskrit *klāmayati*, *klāmati*, "to sleep." Cf. A. Thumb-R. Hauschild, *Handbuch des Sanskrit* II (2nd ed., Heidelberg, 1953), p. 325.

38. From the base *vraj-* (derived from Indo-European *wreg-*), which is related to Latin *urgere*, "to urge," and conveys the idea of going away, withdrawing oneself, renouncing, giving up, etc. Perhaps the reader may not be aware that the English verb *wreck* is a derivative of the root in question here; the *parivrājaka-* is one who has "wrecked" everything so as to be able to strive after liberation all the more freely.

wandered from place to place, and lived on alms. They came from all walks of life and were bound neither by the laws of cast nor by the norms of orthodoxy, so much so that some of them even taught heretical views (e. g., denial of the divine origin and authority of the Vedas). There were certainly among these ascetics rogues and charlatans, but there were also men who were quite sincere and took their life most seriously, and to the ranks of this latter group belonged the Buddha and Mahāvīra.

One of the greatest wonders of the religious history of ancient India is that the ascetics included in their rank and file men hailing from royal and princely families, who voluntarily gave up their possessions and joyfully adopted a mendicant way of life. Siddhartha, the future Buddha, for example, belonged to the royal house of the Śākya clan, and we know that till death he led the life of an itinerant preacher. How are we to interpret this voluntary renunciation of worldly goods, this detachment from everything mundane and appealing to the senses, which had as its necessary consequence a life of extreme poverty? It would be a blatant anachronism to say that all these ascetics were persons who, for the sake of the kingdom of God, embraced a life of voluntary poverty. This is a purely Christian concept, one that is inspired by the tradition of the Hebrew Bible and the teaching of Jesus, and developed in the course of centuries by the monks. In fact, as will be shown in the last section of our study, there is a clear difference between the Indian and Christian ideas of renunciation. The real answer to the question raised here is that the asceticism of groups mentioned above represents the logical development of the theory and practice of magico-mystical heat. In addition to this there were also at work, particularly in the post-vedic period, several other factors which must now be examined.

### III

For a full understanding of the classical Indian ascetic's renunciation of the good things of this world, we have to recall some of the basic tenets of ancient India's religious tradition as it developed in the age after the emergence of the Vedas: tenets which are accepted as incontrovertible and self-evident truths not only by Hinduism but also by Buddhism and Jainism, and which

are best summarized by the technical terms *samsāra-*, *karma-* and *mokṣa-*. These are, so to speak, the universals of Indian religions. The well-known American Indologist Franklin Edgerton, in a most penetrating analysis of the basic concepts that have contributed to the emergence of Indian culture,<sup>39</sup> has pointed out that there is a certain dichotomy in India's religious tradition, in the sense that it recognizes two ways of life, namely, the ordinary and the extraordinary. The former, which is possible for the majority of mortals, is summed up in the *trivarga-*, "the group of three", i. e., *dharma-*, *artha-* and *kāma-*,<sup>40</sup> and the latter, which is meant for the chosen few, "involves some metaphysics." In the early Vedic age people expected to enjoy after death a blissful and happy life in heaven, but in the late Vedic period, and particularly in the age of the origin of the early Upaniṣads, life after death came to be regarded as "not different in nature, and not necessarily different in location from earthly life. Man is entangled in an indefinite series of lives, essentially like the present life, and ordinarily lived on this earth... It is an endless chain..."<sup>41</sup> This state is known as *samsāra-*, and *mokṣa-* or *mukti-* is precisely liberation from this unending chain of lives. Such, in short, is the doctrine of transmigration. Let us now try to understand the doctrine of *samsāra-* which is basic to Indian religions.

From the etymological point of view *samsāra-* is composed of the prefix *sam-* (going back to Indo-European *som-*)<sup>42</sup> "together, with", and the nominal form *sāra-*, from *sar-* (Indo-European *ser-*), "to flow, run, accompany", etc. The Indo-European prefix *som-*, which can be attached to nouns as well

39. Cf. his "Dominant Ideas in the Formation of Indian Culture," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 62 (1942) pp. 151-56 (reprinted in O.L. Chavarría-Aguila, *Traditional India* [Spectrum Books, Engelwood Cliffs, N. J., 1964], pp. 30-37). An earlier study by the same scholar that is quite relevant to our topic is "The Upaniṣads, What do They Seek and Why?" *ibid.* 49 (1929) pp. 97-121.

40. On these, cf. Luke, *Jeevadhara* 2 (1972) pp. 194-96.

41. Edgerton, "Dominant Ideas," p. 153.

42. Observe that the vowel *o* of the parent-language become *a* in Aryan.



as to verbs, survives in Avestan *ham*-<sup>43</sup> in Old Persian *san*-, *sen*- in Lithuanian and Old Slavic *sam*- etc. In Sanskrit *sam*- serves to convey such nuances as union, thoroughness, intensity, completeness, and the like.

From the Indo-European stem *ser*- are derived, besides Sanskrit *sar*-, Latin *serum*, "whey, serum", Latvian *sirt*, "to gather round", Greek *hormaō*, "to hasten", etc. In classical Sanskrit the root occurs in conjunction with a number of prefixes: *anu*-*sar*-, "to go after, follow, obey", *apa*-*sar*-, "to slip off from, go away," *abhi*-*sar*-, "to flow towards, go forward, approach", *pra*-*sar*-, "to move forwards, advance", etc. The antiquity of the root is vouched for by the fact that it is used about seventy-five times in the first Veda in conjunction with prepositions, including also *sam*-,<sup>44</sup> but the meaning is, of course, the obvious and literal one. The special religio-philosophical sense the term *samsāra*- has in classical Indian tradition as represented by Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism came to the foreground only in the age of the Upaniṣads. In these philosophical treatises *samsāra*-, which, etymologically, can best be described as the eternal flow of things, denotes the unending cycle of births and rebirths resulting from the operation of the law of *karma*-, and the extraordinary way referred to earlier is precisely the arduous way, chosen by a select few, of deliverance from this painful process<sup>45</sup>.

A detailed discussion of the idea of *samsāra*- cannot be attempted here, but two passages are cited here at random from the Upaniṣads where the doctrine is expressed most unequivocally by the seers. "Accordingly, those who are of pleasant conduct here - the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a pleasant womb...But those who are of stinking conduct here - the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a stinking womb, either the womb of a dog or the womb of a swine, or the womb of an outcaste" (Chāndogya V:10:7).<sup>46</sup> "He, however, who has no

43. With the change of *s* to *h* (compare n. 25 above).

44. Cf. Grassmann, *op. cit.*, cols 1570 ff.

45. Edgerton, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

46. All citations are from R.E. Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads* (6th impr., Oxford, 1965).

understanding, who is unmindful and ever impure, reaches not the goal, but goes on to reincarnation" (Katha III:7).<sup>47</sup> Here we have the clearest enunciation of the classical doctrine of transmigration. And what is the way out of it?

The supreme way of deliverance from this cyclic process is knowledge. To this effect we read in one of the Upaniṣads: "By knowing God there is a falling of all fetters; with distress destroyed there is a cessation of birth and death" Śvetāsvatara I:11). However, along with knowledge the sages at times enumerate *tapas-*, *brahmacarya-* etc. Compare, "But they who seek the Ātman by austerity, chastity, faith and knowledge... they do not return" (Praśna I:10). There is no reference at all in this second text to what Christian monastic tradition would call voluntary poverty, but it certainly takes for granted, nay, even actively inculcates, the total renunciation of material goods, the motive being the conviction that attachment to them will only serve to perpetuate the law of *samsāra-*. The final reason for accepting penury and need voluntarily is the individual's eagerness to extricate himself from the endless flow of things.

The line of thought we have sketched out here occurs in all its comprehensiveness in Buddhism and Jainism<sup>48</sup> as well. The basic elements of the Buddha's teaching are summarized in the four *āryasatya*s<sup>49</sup> or noble truths which affirm that there is *dukkha*.<sup>49</sup>

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47. To the last word in the translation there corresponds in the original *samsāra-*.

48. To acquaint the reader with the terminology of Pāli, the language of the Buddhist scriptures, we add in notes the Pāli equivalents of Sanskrit words cited in the text. The form adduced here will become in Pāli *ariyasacca-*.

49. Pāli, *dukkha-*. The analysis given by Indian grammarians of *dukkha-*, viz, *duḥ + kha-*, is unfortunately too empirical a description based merely upon superficial observation without any regard for etymology. The word is a prakrit formation derived from *duḥ-siha-*, the latter corresponding to *stā-* in Latin *stāre*, to *stē* in Greek *hi-stē-mi*, etc. This element conveys the idea of an enduring or lasting condition, a state of affairs that is enduring. Etymologically, therefore, *dukkha-* denotes a permanent or enduring and unpleasant state of existence.

in the world, whose ultimate cause is *trṣṇā*<sup>-50</sup>, but it can be transcended and the best means to the total elimination of pain is the treading of the *aṣṭāṅgamārga*<sup>-51</sup> "the eightfold path." Desire is threefold; *kāma*<sup>-52</sup>, or "seeking after the pleasures of the senses, "*bhava*<sup>-53</sup>" yearning for continuance in existence", and *vibhava*<sup>-54</sup>, quest after prosperity, desire for riches, possessions". The Buddhist bhikkhu who has embraced the monastic

50. Pāli. *taṇha*-. The Sanskrit form literally means "thirst", and is etymologically related to this Anglo-Saxon word. It occurs in the first Veda and, when used metaphorically, means "thirst for pleasure," and the like, and thus there arose the nuances "desire, craving, yearning after". The Buddha's conception of desire which often remains unfulfilled as the cause of suffering has close affinity with the findings of Freud!
51. Pāli, *aṭṭhaṅgamagga*-. an enumeration of the eight elements is not necessary here as the list can be found in popular works on Buddhism.
52. Pāli has *kāma-taṇha*-. It may be noted here that *kāma*- consists of the suffix *-mo* (which becomes *ma* in Sanskrit) and the base *kā*- which occurs in Latin *cārus*, Lithuanian *kā-mēt*, etc.
53. Pāli, *bhavataṇha*-, "thirst for continued existence. "Etymologically considered, *bhava*- is related to Latin *fui*, etc., to Greek *phu*- in *phusikē*, *phusis*, etc. As a verbal root *bhu*- means "to become, come into being, happen, occur", and also "to be".
54. Pāli, *vibhavataṇha*-. In Sanskrit *vi*- is a prefix that denotes the idea of separation or negation (compare *vi-kalpa*-, "false, imperfect") as well as that of intensity. This latter sense accrues to the term under consideration. We may note here in passing that the Buddhist conception of the three forms of desire agrees very well with the New Testament teaching concerning the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). According to the writer existence here on earth is characterized by sinfulness which takes concrete form as unlawful gratification of the senses, sinful delights of the mind, and empty trust in possessions.

life has to eradicate from himself *vibhavaṭṭṣṇa-*; he has to renounce worldly possessions and riches and undertake a life of poverty; the mendicant mode of life. It is of the utmost importance to note that the Buddha himself stood for the golden mean, in the sense that he was not in favour either of the extreme form of asceticism advocated by some monks of his age or of libertinism, but yet we know for certain that he lived a life of privation and poverty, depending upon alms freely given by good people. The Buddhist *suttas*<sup>55</sup> repeatedly tell us, for example, how "the Blessed One robed himself early in the morning, and taking his (begging) bowl" went on his preaching tours.

As for the monastic tradition of the Jainas,<sup>56</sup> it is also in complete agreement with the Hindu and Buddhist positions described above. The Jaina monk has to take the vow of poverty, i.e., of being completely divested of property and possessions in all their forms. He has to abandon even the smallest item, including also preservation of food for later use. The reason for this strict prohibition should be clear enough: the desire for riches will necessarily perpetuate the process of birth and rebirth.

India's religious traditions, then, recognize poverty or voluntary renunciation of material goods as an integral factor in the life of those who strive after deliverance by following the extraordinary way. This is a point on which the Christian and Indian traditions are in full agreement, but when we examine the motive behind the abandonment of the good things of this world, we find that the two differ from each other very radically. The Christian concept of poverty has been explained by other contributors to this issue, so that a reference to it is not necessary here. In the Indian religious tradition the motive for embracing a life of privation and hardship is either *tapas-*, the endeavour to produce magico-mystical heat and acquire special powers, or the elimination of the cyclic process of birth

55. This is the Pāli form of Sanskrit *sūtras*.

56. Cf. W. Schubring, *The Doctrine of the Jainas* (Delhi, 1962), pp. 247-90 (on the vow of poverty, cf. p. 302).



and rebirth. As we have seen in the second part of our study, *tapas-* is derived from the Indo-European tradition, but in the Indian tradition it has come to include the suffering of penury and want as well. Those who prefer to tread the extraordinary way to liberation are convinced that the longing for material goods only tends to prolong the painful process of *samsāra-* and hence they most willingly deprive themselves of riches and possessions. According to the Indian tradition "the man of God" is a person who has renounced everything; he is a *daridra-*, a "poor man", and his state of life is *dāridrya-*, "poverty".

We bring our study to a close with two texts from Śaṅkara, the prince of Indian thinkers and a great ascetic and mystic. In a poem known as *Kaupīna Pañcaka*<sup>57</sup> he describes in detail the life of the sanyāsin. Here is the first stanza:

*vedāntavākyeṣu sadā ramanto  
bhikṣānnamatreṇa ca tuṣṭimantah  
aśokamantaḥkaraṇe ramantah  
kaupīnavantah khalu bhagyavantah*

"That one who revels in the meaning of vendantic texts, who is fully satisfied with what little food he collects by begging for it, who carries on without any sort of misery in the mind – such a one who possesses only a *kaupīna*<sup>58</sup> is alone the sole possessor of all the wealth in the universe." The second text is from another composition of the great sage that bears the title *Bhavānyaṣṭakam*<sup>59</sup>;

57. For the text of the poem, cf. *Kaivalya Sudha* 9 (1972) pp. 17f.

58. This Sanskrit word represents a vṛddhi-formation from *kūp-*, "hole, pit", with the addition of the suffix *-īna* (for the same suffix, cf. *navīna-*). The object designated by the term is known in Tamil as *kōvaṇam*, in Malayalam as *kōṇakam*, *kōṇām*, in Kanarese as *kōvaṇa*, in Tulu as *kōvaṇa*, *kōmaṇa*, in Telugu as *gōvaṇamu*, *gōṇamu*, etc. For the sake of those who many not be familiar with Indian items of dress, it may be noted here that the term denotes the small piece of cloth worn over the pudenda.

59. The text of the poem (with musical notations) is given in Thumb- Hauschild, *op. cit.*, pp. 159–62.

it is very significant inasmuch as it shows that renunciation of everything leads one to finding sole refuge in the godhead (in this text, in Bhāvani who is another form of Śakti or Kālī):

*na tāto na mātā na bandhur na dātā  
na putro na putrī na bhṛtyo na bhartā  
na jāya na vittaṃ na vṛtir mamaiva  
gatis tvam gatis tvam tvamekā Bhavān-(i)*

Since the meaning of the text is clear enough,<sup>60</sup> comments are not necessary. The genuine sanyasin is a poor man who has only a *kaupīna-* as his own, and what compensates for his lack of the amenities of life is his finding refuge in the godhead.

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60. We may translate *gati-* (literally "going") with the help of the well-known Sanskrit word *śaraṇa-*, and the sense accordingly will be, "You are my *śaraṇa-*, you alone are my *śaraṇa-*, O Bhavāni!"

## BULLETIN:

# The Church and Garibi Hatao\*

The Church in India has consistently projected an image of social concern which has been recognised by all, even non-Christians. The humanitarian work of missionaries in different parts of the country for the welfare of the poor and the handicapped has contributed substantially to setting up a network of Christian educational and social institutions that are even today continually responding to those who are in need. Initially the Christian commitment to the service of the poor took the form of relief and rehabilitation in that the Church had the flexibility and the capacity to mobilize its resources in personnel and technical skills to meet emergencies in which people were in desperate need because of natural calamities or of poverty or social discrimination.

In the last decade, however, there has been a shift in the approach of Church agencies from relief to development and the driving purpose behind the Church's involvement in socio-economic development has been to help the people to improve their own situation through their own efforts so as to achieve self-reliance and self-respect. This change from relief to development is seen in the changing objectives of several organizations which were before exclusively concerned with relief work. It is, however, not easy to draw a sharp line between relief and development work because often what begins as a relief operation ends up as genuine development work in so far as it lays down an infrastructure of attitudes and material resources that can stimulate the people to contribute more energetically to their own betterment. For example, the massive relief work undertaken in Andhra when it was devastated by a cyclone in 1970 has now moved in the direction of village reconstruction, that is, villagers who initially were merely recipients of external aid are now contributing with

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\* *Garibi Hatao* is a Hindi phrase meaning: "Remove Poverty".  
(Ed.)

services and their limited resources to building up for themselves a more humane social environment.

Though the change from relief to development work is in keeping with the new understanding of integral human development and, while it is true that higher status is attached to developmental activity than to mere relief work, it would be wrong to underestimate the tremendous contribution which the Church has made through her relief activities to helping the poor and alleviating human misery. It made all the difference to the people in Bihar and Orissa at the time of famine in 1966-67 when Christian agencies rushed to their rescue. The contribution of the Churches in this crucial period of drought and famine was publicly acknowledged by the government and by such enlightened leaders as Jai Prakash Narain. Similarly when millions of refugees poured into India from Bangla Desh, the Churches were able to collaborate with the government in organising very effective relief programmes for these destitute people who had been forced to flee from their homeland. This massive ecumenical effort of the Churches helped to save millions of poor people from starvation and to give them a new sense of hope. Similarly, the Churches are now actively engaged in the various drought-stricken areas of the country, providing food and work for the people and helping them to survive this critical period before the outbreak of the monsoon rains.

### **Inequality**

It would be a mistake to think that the work of the Churches so far has been only to look after the physical needs of the poor. On the contrary the Church has been continually conscious of the linkage between poverty and social inequality, and the missionary effort right from the beginning has been to enable the under-privileged sections of society to raise their social standing primarily through education. In Chotanagpur, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Nagaland, the Churches have brought about a transformation in the living standards of the tribals and Harijans by providing them with education, legal assistance, and social institutions. So effective has been the work of the Churches for the



Harijans and the tribals that even Verrier Elwin, the anthropologist and formerly Adviser to the Government on tribal welfare, extolled it in his autobiography *The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin* (1964). "No one can withhold admiration from the Christian missionaries," he wrote. "They have brought to India the spirit of adventure and dedication. Hundreds of them have gone to live in the remotest places, denying themselves the comforts and amenities of life for many years. They have been pioneers in the treatment of leprosy, championed the underdog, befriended the untouchables and taken a leading part in sponsoring the cause of the tribal people. They have done much for the languages of India, especially the tribal languages. In the fields of education and medicine their work has been distinguished by professional competence and human affection for children and the sick." Similarly, J. P. Naik, Member-Secretary of the Educational Commission, acknowledged that "the idea that Hinduism got from Christianity was that the way to God lies through the service of man. I think this is a new concept to Hinduism. We have our ways of *Dhyana*, *Karma*, and *Bhakti*, but the emphasis on *Seva*, the service of man as a method, and an important method, of realising God came through our contact with Christianity."

We have today numerous Christian agencies that are directly involved in financing relief and development work. Caritas India, the Indo-German Social Service Society, Catholic Relief Services, Misereor are some of the more important Christian funding agencies that have been supporting the efforts of numerous projects all over the country for socio-economic development at the village level.<sup>1</sup> The impact of these funding organizations, which have generally directed their efforts to improving the standards of living of Christian groups, has not been restricted to the socio-economic sphere. They have, in fact, brought about a change in mentality among the people and encouraged them to undertake the task of mobilizing their own resources for the

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1. For some detailed reports of relief programmes and development projects, see *Biennial Report: 1967-68* (New Delhi: Catholic Charities India, 1968); *Financing Integrated Agricultural Development* (New Delhi: AFPRO, 1971); "The Indian Social Institute Extension Service" in *Social Action*, 17 (July-August, 1967), pp. 296-307.

common good. Their efforts have generated a consciousness among Christians of the need to improve their socio-economic situation and a growing confidence that they can achieve this end through their own efforts.

Another new trend is that the Churches are now going outside the Christian community and seeking out the needy wherever they are. For instance, water resources development, credit facilities, fertilizers and improved seeds are now being made available to small farmers on the basis of need, irrespective of their religious affiliation. This new direction of Christian involvement in socio-economic development has been interpreted as a sign of the growing way to a broader concern for the community as such rather than only for Christians. The new orientation of the Churches to those in other religious faiths is a controversial issue and in many areas it is not unusual for Christians to insist that the efforts of the Churches towards socio-economic development should be restricted exclusively to the Christian community.

The role of the Church in the entire sphere of social and economic development and particularly in the struggle against poverty has now come in for critical reflection among the more perceptive social and theological thinkers in the Church. This self-reflection has been stimulated by the experience of Christian communities in the underdeveloped countries of Latin America and, in no small measure, by the various papal documents.

### **Liberation**

Broadly speaking, there are three distinct trends that are emerging from this prolonged reflection on the involvement of the Church in the struggle for social equality and social justice. First there are some who believe that in India, as opposed to the South American countries, there is a preoccupation with *economic* development rather than with integral human development and the *liberation* of man from poverty and social and political oppression. This concept of liberation demands a change in the traditional attitude of the people who have to be helped. Instead of looking upon them as "objects" and recipients of aid, liberation requires that social and economic development must be accomplished in the community and with the collaboration of the people,

in other words, the people must be helped to work out their own destiny and to decide not only the objectives of social and economic programmes but also the strategies for achieving them.

Second, there are some who advocate what may be called a "gradualist" approach to the entire programme of social change and the elimination of poverty. The exponents of this approach believe that the Church can play an effective role in the elimination of mass poverty and the realization of social justice by working for social change within the existing democratic framework of society. The idea that radical social change is not possible without a violent upheaval of society is rejected by this group who fully endorse the Church's approach to social change through non-violent action.

Third, a small but articulate and growing number of Christian theologians and social thinkers believe that the gradualist approach to social change hardly touches the surface of the problems of poverty and social injustice in this country. If we are to work within the existing structure of society, they argue, then all that the Church can do is to come to the aid of the victims of the social systems which are weighted against the poor and the underprivileged. It is therefore felt that the attempt to bring about radical social change through non-violence boils down to what may be called a "band aid" approach which heals the wounds of the victims of the system but does nothing to transform the social conditions which are responsible for human poverty and suffering. Though it is acknowledged that the various social and economic programmes of the Church have been immensely beneficial to the poor and the underprivileged, it is now believed that these programmes, which may have been justified in the past, now only contribute to maintaining the *status quo*, that is, an unjust system of social and economic relations.

Though the aspect of violence is extremely controversial, there is wide consensus among Christian social thinkers on the need of structural changes for any successful attack on mass poverty. The primary concern of social justice, it is being realized, is not to formulate *ad hoc* solutions to the problems of hunger and social discrimination but rather to bring about the transformation of the structures of the social system which perpetuate

economic and social relations that are inimical to human dignity because they restrict the exercise of personal freedom and responsibility. It is this "institutionalized violence" or "established disorder" that social justice seeks to eliminate by "building a world where every man, no matter what his race, religion or nationality, can live a fully human life, freed from servitude imposed on him by other men or by natural forces over which he has no sufficient control; a world where freedom is not an empty word, where the poor man Lazarus can sit down at the same table with the rich man."<sup>2</sup>

### Social justice

An examination of the Five Year Plans shows that the objectives of the socialistic pattern of society were economic growth *with* social justice. This broad aim of planning for socio-economic development in the country has been often stated in the Plan documents. For example, the Fourth Five Year Plan indicated that the social objectives aimed at were a "socialistic pattern of society" in which there would be equalization of educational and employment opportunities and more equitable distribution of income, power and privilege. The Indian Five Year Plans have been explicitly oriented to the achievement of the egalitarian ideals enshrined in the Constitution. The social objectives they seek are "to raise the standard of living... especially of the less privileged sections of society. Our planning should result not only in an integrated process of increased production, but in rational distribution of the added wealth. The overriding inspiration must be a burning sense of social justice... The benefits of development should accrue in increasing measure to the common man and to the weaker sections of society... by reducing disparities of income and wealth."<sup>3</sup> This egalitarian rationale is now being given a sharper focus in the *Garibi Hatao* strategy outlined in the *Approach to the Fifth Five Year Plan*.

It would be incorrect to believe that the orientation of the Approach paper marks a departure from the previous plans as

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2. *Populorum Progressio*, n. 47.

3. *Fourth Five Year Plan: A Draft Outline* (New Delhi: Planning Commission, Government of India, 1966), p. 16.



though now for the first time emphasis is being placed on what is called "a direct attack" on poverty. All the previous Plans were concerned with introducing structural changes in the social system so as to secure "a rapid economic growth and expansion of employment, reduction of disparities in income and wealth, prevention of concentration of economic power and the creation of the values and attitudes of a free and equal society."<sup>4</sup> The "direct attack" on poverty is aimed at bringing about wide-reaching structural changes in our economy, not merely in the distributional pattern of national income but also in the distribution of the means of production and the patterns of consumption. How successful this *Garibi Hatao* strategy is likely to be is uncertain because of our well-known inability to implement the beautiful plans we are so skilled in formulating.<sup>5</sup>

The anti-poverty strategy of the Fifth Plan will appeal to the Christian Churches because what are proposed are radical structural changes in the social system in order to raise the standard of living of the poor and the under-privileged without a violent revolution and within the framework of a democratic society established by the Constitution. It is within this framework of a direct attack on poverty that the Churches should plan socio-economic projects at the micro-level for the benefit of the poor and the oppressed. However, the magnitude of the problem of eliminating poverty in India must not be under-estimated and therefore it will be useful to reflect on the dimensions of poverty in India as they are projected by the high rate of population growth, the food scarcity and unemployment.

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4. *Approach to the Fifth Five Year Plan* (New Delhi: Planning Commission, Government of India, 1972), p. 3.
  5. For a discussion of the new anti-poverty approach, see K. R. Ranadive, "Growth and Social Justice: Political Economy of 'Garibi Hatao'", *Economic and Political Weekly* VII (May 5, 1973), pp. 834-841; C. T. Kurian, "What is Growth? Some Thoughts on the Economics of 'Garibi Hatao'", *Economic and Political Weekly*, VII (December 23, 1972), pp. 2493-2497.

## Dimensions of poverty

As the Approach paper indicates, even after two decades of so-called social and economic development, the number of people below the absolute poverty line is over 40 per cent of the total population, or about 220 million. These people are living below the level of absolute poverty which is defined as a minimum monthly consumption expenditure of Rs. 20 per capita at 1960-61 prices. The rural people constitute the bulk of those living in abject poverty and they comprise landless labourers and small and marginal farmers. If we were to rely only on the mechanisms of distribution in the existing economic system without any direct intervention in employment and income distribution, it is estimated that it would take anywhere from 30 to 50 years for those living below the poverty line to reach minimum consumption levels. In order to raise the standard of living of these vast masses of the poor, the Plan outlines a strategy in which the main thrust will be towards increased employment opportunities, particularly in the rural sector, and towards providing minimum essential needs such as elementary education, public health facilities, drinking water, roads and rural electrification and slum improvement in the cities.

One of the major factors which has delayed the economic emancipation of the masses of our people is the high annual growth-rate of population: about 2.5 per cent. It is estimated on the basis of the 1971 census that in 2001 the population will cross the one billion mark. It is not so much that the birth-rate is high as that there has been a sharp decline in the death-rate and this annual increase of the population has had serious repercussions on education, health and employment. The number of illiterates in the country is approximately 385 million, showing an increase of 30 million over the last decade. Given such a high percentage of illiteracy, it seems most uncertain that the education system will be able to cope with the problem of providing at least primary education to all children within the age group 6-11. The Approach Plan aims at achieving an enrolment of 84 per cent in the age group 6-11 and 40 per cent in the age group 11-14. However, even if this target is in fact achieved, its significance will have to be evaluated in the light of the known high drop-out rate of children in the rural areas.

Since the bulk of the people live and work there, the population growth primarily affects this section of the people who are traditionally among the poorest in the country. The pressure of population on the land and the unfavourable land-man ratio has given rise to a "push" factor leading to the migration of people from rural areas and the uncontrolled expansion of the metropolitan and urban centres. The existing medical facilities which are available for the people appear to be totally inadequate. At present there is one public health centre supported by 8-10 sub-centres for a block population of 80,000 - 1,00,000. It has been also estimated that about 1,50,000 villages annually out of a total of 5,67,000 do not have an adequate supply of drinking water. The levels of health, nutrition and literacy remain deplorably low among the impoverished masses in the rural sector, and while the ratio of doctors to population in the urban areas is 1:1200, it is 1:15,000 in the rural ones.

### Unemployment

The rapid growth of the population has created a tremendous problem of unemployment and particularly under-employment. Though land reform is officially regarded as an instrument of social justice, legislation regarding the redistribution of land and tenurial arrangements has been implemented selectively so that the conditions of small and marginal farmers and the landless labourers remain virtually unchanged. After over two decades of land reform, there were over 45 million landless labourers in 1971. The problem of unemployment and under-employment is particularly crucial in the rural areas. The magnitude of this problem can be gauged from the fact that in 1969, it was estimated that there were about 11 million in the rural areas and nearly 2 million in the urban areas who were openly unemployed. Recent projections indicate that 5 million are expected to enter the labour force in the next two Plan periods thus making it necessary to increase job opportunities by at least six million annually.

In the urban areas, the problem of the educated unemployed is assuming alarming proportions. In 1967 there were about half a million educated unemployed in India; in 1970 the

number was reported to be 1.75 million and in 1972-73 the number of matriculates and above on the registers of employment exchanges was 2.3 million. The reliability of these estimates is of course open to question; yet they do point out the dimensions of the crisis of unemployment in the country. The various crash schemes for the creation of employment in the rural areas through public rural works, and in the urban areas through facilities for self-employment, have failed to generate the volume of employment that was expected.

To a great extent, the problem of unemployment is linked to the intensive nature of capital concentration in the modern or industrialised sector. Since the technology utilized is imported from the West where the primary consideration is to maximize profits by saving on labour, the bulk of the investment in public sector undertakings as well as those of the private sector has not generated employment opportunities in proportion to investment. There is continual talk about the need to innovate intensive labour methods both in industry and in agriculture, but as yet very little progress has been made in adapting imported technology to the conditions of a labour surplus situation. The approach paper however has proposed an elaborate scheme for generation of employment in the agricultural as well as the service sector, and an outlay of Rs. 1075 crores has been earmarked for the development of intensive employment programmes in irrigation, forestry, fisheries, construction activity, road transport, etc. and in small scale industries.

### **Manipulation**

It should be noted that the anti-poverty strategy of the Approach paper is merely a design for action. It does not guarantee that the desirable social objectives it seeks will be actually realized. For example, the recent take-over of wholesale trade in wheat was intended for the benefits of the poor who were being exploited by private wholesale and retail dealers. Yet in spite of the rhetoric of the Government, the results have been just the opposite of what was intended and today the poor are in the unhappy situation of finding the public distribution system unable to cope with their minimum needs while the prices of coarse grains which are consumed mostly by the poor have



shot up even above the price of wheat. The people who seem to have benefited by the government take-over of foodgrains have been the larger farmers and the private grain dealers who were able to commandeer large stocks of grain and prevent them from entering the public food distribution system.

Similarly when the banks were nationalized in July 1969 and thousands of new branches were opened in "unbanked" centres, it was thought that credit facilities would be easily available to marginal and small farmers. But it has been now revealed that out of the total lending engaged in by the banks, less than 20 per cent went to the people of the rural areas. Again even when special educational schemes have been instituted to raise the social and economic standards of underprivileged sections of the population, they have not been able to compete with children from the upper classes for entry into the better educational institutions and the more lucrative occupations. For example over a period exceeding 2 decades, the Government of India awarded over one million scholarships to Scheduled Caste students; yet a recent research study concluded that these Scheduled Caste students continued to be educationally backward because the rates of enrolment and retention are poor and they tend to be clustered in inferior institutions.

This failure to achieve the social objectives of anti-poverty programmes is seen in practically all sectors of National life. The reason for this is the structure of our society in which there is a sharp cleavage between the rich and the poor, with the few rich monopolizing the means of production and controlling a disproportionate share of the disposable income. In this situation, there is a tendency for even enlightened programmes and reforms to be rendered ineffective because of the influence of the privileged classes who can manipulate the social, economic and political structures of the system to their own advantage.

### **New tasks**

The magnitude of the problem of poverty in the country requires that the Churches should work for the liberation of the people from poverty, hunger, disease and social discrimination, within the strategy of the Approach to the Fifth Plan. Their action in the field of socio-economic development will no doubt

be limited by resource constraints, particularly those of finances and personnel. This should not lead to discouragement or cynicism but rather to a spirit of optimistic realism. At present the Christian organisations are engaged in the anti-poverty programme either by helping the marginal and small farmers with assistance to develop water resources or to have access to credit for the purchase of agricultural inputs. Others are helping to reclaim waste land for the settlement of landless labourers and, in many areas of the country, the poor are being assisted to improve their social and economic position through education and occupational training.

What the Church can do to ensure the success of the *Garibi Hatao* strategy of the Fifth Plan is to create among the people, who often appear to be submerged in fatalism and resignation, a new awareness of their dignity and their capacity to create for themselves an environment conducive to their total human development. In order to achieve this the Church, much more than has been done so far, will have to help the poor to liberate themselves by providing them with opportunities for the development of technical skills and organizational strength so that they will be able to live in a social environment of freedom and responsibility. The skill with which the Church, over the years, adapted herself to the needs of the people suggests that this new challenge to develop a new methodology for integral human development can be met by her. She is now going through a period of intense reflection in the light of the Gospel on its commitment to the service of the poor.

The Churches will have to draw up their list of priorities in the field of socio-economic development in terms of their financial and human resources, and no doubt ways will be found to integrate projects at the micro-level into the regional and national planning framework. There is reason to believe that through this direct attack on poverty and unemployment they will be able to help the masses of the poor to liberate themselves from dehumanizing conditions of life and to create a society characterized by freedom, equality of opportunity and social justice.



## Contributors

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